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RED SPIDER

II.

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RED SPIDER

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'JOHN HERRING' 'MEHALAH' &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

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1887

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OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

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RED SPIDER.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DEAD DOG.

The second night of watch proved unavailing, for the best of good reasons, that the watch was not kept. Oliver Luxmore sat up, but, finding the night chilly outside the house, attempted to keep watch with a pipe of tobacco and a jug and glass of cider posset within. The consequence was that he went to sleep over the fire. During that same night another of the lambs was worried. Mischief had also been done at Swaddledown, as the family heard during the day. There a ewe had been killed, overrun, thrown into a grip

(dyke by hedge) whence it could not rise, and where it had been torn, and had died.

'We must not ask your father to watch again,' said Hillary, with the corners of his mouth twitching. 'We believe what he says now when he tells us he is very shortsighted. I will come to-night and the night after, if need be, till I earn my guinea. The rascal has been here twice and has escaped. He shall not succeed the third time. I will take a nap by day and be lively as an owl at night.'

The maids at Chimsworthy joked the lad about his visits to the cottage; he did not go there after the dog, but after Kate. A guinea! What was a guinea to the heir of Chimsworthy? A young man cares more for girls' hearts than for money. He did not contradict them, he turned aside their banter with banter. But the lively conversation of Kate had lost its charm for him. He exchanged jests with her, but took less pleasure than heretofore in doing

so. That night and the next he spent at his post watching for the lamb-killer. Honor gave him her company. He was surprised at himself for becoming serious, still more that the conversation and society of the grave Honor should afford him so much pleasure. In her company everything assumed a new aspect, was seen through coloured glass.

Honor herself was changed during these still night watches. A softness, inbred in her, but to which she was unable to yield during the day, manifested itself in her manner, her speech, her appearance, a bloom as that on the plum. Her inner heart unfolded like a night-flower, and poured forth fragrance. Thoughts that had long dwelt and worked in her mind, but to which she had never given words, found expression at last. Her real mind, her great, pure, deep soul, had been as a fountain sealed to her father and sister Kate; they could not have understood her thoughts; she knew this without acknowledging it other than

by instinctive silence. But now she had beside her a companion, sympathetic, intelligent; and the night that veiled their faces and the working of their emotions allowed them to speak with frankness. Banter died away on Hillary's lips, he respected her and her thoughts too highly to treat either lightly. Though he could not fully understand her he could not withhold his reverence. He saw the nobility of her character, her self-devotion made beautiful by its unconsciousness, her directness of purpose, her thoroughness, and her clear simplicity running through her life like a sparkling river. Her nature was the reverse of his own. He treated life as a holiday, and its duties as annoyances; she looked to the duties as constituting life, and to pleasures as accidents. He became dissatisfied with himself without feeling resentment towards Honor for inspiring the feeling. With all his frivolity and self-conceit there was good stuff in Hillary. It was evidence of this that he now appreciated

Honor. At night, under the dark heavens strewn with stars, or with the moon rising as a globe of gold over Dartmoor, these two young people sat on the bench, with potato-sacks over their shoulders sheltering them from the dew, or at the hearth suffused by the glow of the peat embers, and talked with muffled voices as if in church.

The second, the third night, during which Hillary watched, passed uneventfully. Each night, or morning rather, as Hillary left, the pressure of his hand clasping that of Honor became warmer. After he was gone, the girl sat musing for some minutes, listening to his dying steps as he passed along the lane homewards. Then she sighed, shook her head, as though to shake off some dream that stole over her, and went to bed.

Hillary's determined watching was not, however, destined to remain fruitless. Early on the fourth night, after he had been at his post an hour, the bleating and scampering

of the sheep showed that their enemy was at hand.

In another moment both saw a dark animal dash across the field in pursuit. Hillary fired, and the creature fell over.

'Bring a lantern, Honor,' he shouted. 'Let us see whose dog it is.'

She ran indoors. Her father and Kate had been roused by the report.

When she returned with the lantern to the field, 'You were right, Honor,' said Hillary, 'this is Uncle Taverner's Rover. Poor fellow, we were friends once, when I was allowed at Langford. Now he and his master have fallen to bad ways. I have put the seal on my misdoings, and Uncle Taverner will never forgive me for having shot his dog.'

'Well, perhaps you will recover your wits now,' said Kate.

'Wits! why?'

'Wits—you have been dull enough lately.

Perhaps as the dog went sheep-killing, your wits went wool-gathering. They have been dead, or not at home.'

'Go home, Larry,' said Honor; 'and take our best thanks to warm you.'

Hillary, however, seemed ill-disposed to go. He hung about the kitchen pretending that his fingers wanted warming, or considering what was to be done with the carcass of the dog. What he really desired was a further chat with Honor. But Kate would not allow him to be alone with her sister, though unsuspicious of the state of his feelings, and indifferent to them herself. She was like a mosquito that buzzes about a sleep-drunk man, threatening him, rousing him, settling, and stabbing, and escaping before his hand can chastise. The more she plied him with her jokes, the more dispirited he became, and incapable of repartee.

'Well,' said he at length, 'I suppose it is time for all to go to bed. You have all seen enough of the dead dog.'

'And we of the live lion,' said Kate.

He went hesitatingly to the door, then came back, tied the dog's hind feet together, and slung the body over his back on his gun. Then he went back to the door.

Kate said something to Honor, gave Larry a nod, and went away to bed.

Honor accompanied him to the door, to fasten it after him.

'I wish Rover had not come for a couple of hours,' he said, as he held out his hand.

'You have won your guinea, and must be content,' she answered with a smile.

'Do you suppose I care for the guinea, except that I may share it with you?' he asked. 'I'll tell you what we will do with it, break it in half, and each keep a half.'

'Then it will be of no good to either,' answered Honor. 'You told me yourself that the money was a consideration to you, as you were empty-pocketed.'

'I forgot all about the guinea after the first

night in the pleasure of being with you. I would give the guinea to be allowed to come here again to-morrow night. Confound old Rover for being in such a hurry for his dose of lead.'

'What is that about lead?' called Kate from the steps of the stairs. 'I think, Larry, the lead has got into your brains, and into your feet.'

Honor shook her head, and tried to withdraw her hand from that of the young man; but he would not release it. 'No, Larry, no, that cannot be.'

'May I not come again?'

'No, Larry, on no account,' she said gravely.

'But, Honor, if I come down the lane, and you hear the owls call very loud under the bank, you will open the door and slip out. You will bring the potato-sacks, and let us have a talk again on the bench with them over our shoulders?'

'No, I will not—indeed I will not. I pray

you, if you have any thought for me, do not try this. Good-night, Larry—you are a brother to me.'

She wrenched her hand from his, and shut the door. He heard her bolt it. Then he went down the steps and walked away, ill pleased. But after he had gone some distance, he turned, and saw the cottage door open, and Honor standing in it, her dark figure against the fire glow. Had she relented and changed her mind? He came back. Then the door was shut and barred again. He was offended, and, to disguise his confusion, whistled a merry air, and whistled it so loud as that Honor might hear it and understand that her refusal gave him no concern.

Hillary had not reached the end of the lane before he stumbled against Charles.

'Hallo!' exclaimed the latter. 'What are you doing here at this time o' night? Got your gun, eh? And game too, eh? Poaching on Langford. A common poacher. I'll re-

port you. Not hare-hunting yet? Take care how you do that. I'll break your neck if you come near Langford after that game.'

'What you have been doing is clear enough,' said Hillary, stepping aside. 'You have been at the "Ring of Bells," drinking.'

'What if I have? No harm in that, if I have money to pay my score. Nothing against that, have you?'

'Nothing at all; but I doubt your having the money. A week ago you were reduced to a brass token.'

'You think yourself cock of the walk, do you?' said Charles, insolently, 'because you are heir to Chimsworthy? What is Chimsworthy to Coombe Park? Come! I bet now you've naught but coppers in your pocket. Hands in and see which can make the most show.'

As he spoke, he thrust forth his palm, and Hillary heard the chink of money, and the sound of coins falling on the stones.

'If you had money at the fair-time,' said Hillary, coldly, 'all I can say is that you behaved infamously.'

'I had no money then.'

'How you have got it since, I do not know,' said Hillary.

'That is no concern of yours, Master Larry,' answered Charles, roughly. 'You will live to see me Squire at Coombe Park; and when I'm there, curse me if I don't offer you the place of game-keeper to keep off rogues. An old poacher is the best keeper.'

'You cur!' exclaimed Hillary, blazing up. 'This is my game.' He swung the dead dog about, and struck Charles on the cheek with the carcass so violently as to knock him into the hedge. 'This is my game. Your master's dog, which has been worrying and killing your father's lambs whilst you have been boozing in a tavern.'

'By George!' swore Charles, with difficulty

picking himself up. 'I'll break your cursed neck, I will.'

But Larry had gone on his way by the time Charles had regained equilibrium.

'This is the second time he's struck me down,' said Charles, and next moment a great stone passed Larry, then another struck the dead dog on his back with sufficient force to have stunned him had it struck his head.

He turned and shouted angrily, 'You tipsy blackguard, heave another, and I'll shoot. The gun is loaded.'

'And, by George! I'll break your neck!' yelled Charles after him.

CHAPTER XX.

A FIVE-POUND NOTE.

No sooner had Hillary got the guinea for shooting the sheep-killer than he went to the cottage and offered half to Honor Luxmore. She refused it, and would by no persuasion be induced to accept it.

'No, Larry, no—a thousand times no. You redeemed my cloak, and will not let me pay you for that. I will not touch a farthing of this well-earned prize.'

Then Larry went to Tavistock and expended part of the money in the purchase of a handsome silk kerchief, white with sprigs of lilac, and slips of moss-rose on it. He returned in the carrier's van instead of waiting for his

father, who remained to drink with other farmers. This entailed the walking up of the hills. When he got out for this object, he left his parcel on the seat. On his return he found the women within sniggering.

'Don't y' be offended at us now,' said one. 'But it is just so. Your parcel came open of herself wi' the jolting of the Vivid, and us couldn't help seeing what was inside. Us can't be expected to sit wi' our eyes shut. 'Taint in reason nor in nature. I must say this—'tis a pretty kerchief, and Kate Luxmore will look like a real leddy in it o' Sunday, to be sure.'

Then the rest of the women laughed.

Hillary coloured, and was annoyed. The parcel had not come open of itself. The women's inquisitive fingers had opened it, and their curious eyes had examined the contents. They had rushed to the conclusion that the kerchief was intended for Kate—Larry was much about with the maiden, they were always teasing each other, laughing together, and

Hillary had been several evenings to the carrier's cottage guarding the lambs and sheep.

The young man did not disabuse them of their error. He was vexed that they should suppose him caught by the rattle Kate, instead of by the reliable Honor; it showed him that they supposed him less sensible than he was. But he thought with satisfaction of the surprise of the gossips on Sunday, when they saw the kerchief about the neck of the elder sister, instead of that of Kate.

In this expectation, however, he was disappointed. Next day, he went to the cottage at an hour when he was sure to find Honor there alone, and, with radiant face and sparkling eyes, unfolded the paper, and offered his present to the girl.

Honor was more startled than pleased—at least, it seemed so—and at first absolutely declined the kerchief. 'No, Larry, I thank you for your kind thought, but I must not accept it. I am sorry that you have spent your

money—the kerchief is very pretty; but I cannot wear it.'

'How wrong-headed and haughty you are, Honor! Why will you not take it?' The blood made his face dark, he was offended and angry. He had never made a girl a present before, and this, his first, was rejected. 'It gave me a vast deal of pleasure buying it. I turned over a score, and couldn't well choose which would look best on your shoulders. You have given me good advice; and here is my return, as an assurance that I will observe it.'

'I am not wrong-headed and haughty, Larry,' answered Honor, gently. 'But see! in spite of what I said, in spite of my better judgment, rather than wound you, I will take the handkerchief. Indeed, indeed, dear Larry, I am not unthankful and ungracious, though I may seem so. And now I will only take it as a pledge that you have laid my words to heart. Let it mean that, and that only. But, Larry, the women in the van

saw it. I cannot wear it just now, certainly not on Sunday next. You know yourself what conclusions they would draw, and we must not deceive them into taking us to be what we are not, and never can be, to each other.'

'Why not, Honor?'

Instead of answering, she said with a smile, 'My brother, Larry, this I will undertake. When I see that you have become a man of deeds and not of words, then I will throw the kerchief round my neck and wear it at church. It shall be a token to you of my approval. Will that content you?'

He tried his utmost to obtain a further concession. She was resolute. She did not wish to be ungracious, but she was determined to give him no encouragement. She had thought out her position, and resolved on her course. She knew that her way was chalked for her. She must be mother to all her little sisters and brothers, till they were grown up and had dispersed. There was no saying what her father

might do were she away. He might marry again, and a stepmother would ill-treat or neglect the little ones. If she were to marry, it could be on one understanding only, that she brought the family with her to the husband's house—and to that no man would consent. It would be unfair to burden a young man thus. Her father, moreover, was not a man to be left. What Charles had become, without a firm hand over him, that might Oliver Luxmore also become, even if he did not marry. His dispositions were not bad, but his character was infirm. No! it was impossible for her to contemplate marriage. Kate might, but not she. The line of duty lay clear before her as a white road in summer heat, and she had not even the wish to desert it. It was right for her to nip Larry's growing liking for herself, at once and in the bud.

After Larry had gone, she folded and put away his present among her few valuables. She valued it, as the first warm breath of spring

is valued. She said nothing to Kate or the others about it. Her heart was lighter, and she sang over her work. The little offering was a token that through the troubled sky the sun was about to shine.

A day or two after, Charles lounged in, and seated himself by the fire. She was pleased to see him. He was at honest work with Mr. Langford, earning an honest wage. She said as much. Charles laughed contemptuously. 'Ninepence,' he said, 'ninepence a day. What is ninepence?'

'It is more than you had as a soldier.'

'But as a soldier I had the uniform and the position. Now I am a day-labourer—I, a Luxmore, the young squire with ninepence and lodging and meat.'

'Well, Charles, it is a beginning.'

'Beginning at ninepence. As Mrs. Veale says, "One can't stand upon coppers and keep out of the dirt." What is the meat and drink? The cider cuts one's throat as it goes down,

and the food is insufficient and indigestible. If I had not a friend to forage for me, I should be badly off.'

'If you keep this place a twelvemonth, you will get a better situation next year.'

'Keep at Langford a twelvemonth!' exclaimed Charles. 'Not if I know it. It won't do. Never mind why. I say it won't do.'

Then he began working his heel in a hole of the floor where the slate was broken.

'You know Mrs. Veale?' he asked, without looking at his sister.

'Yes, Charles. That is, I have seen her, and have even spoken to her, but—know her—that is more than I profess. She is not a person I am like to know.'

'You had better not,' said Charles. 'She don't love you. When I mention your name her face turns green. She'd ill-wish you if she could.'

'I have never done her an injury,' said Honor.

'That may be. Hate is like love, it pitches at random, as Mrs. Veale says. You may laugh, Honor, but that same woman is in love with me.'

'Nonsense!' Honor did not laugh, she was too shocked to laugh.

'What is there nonsensical in that? I tell you she is. She cooks me better food than for the rest of the men, and she favours me in many ways.'

'She cannot be such a fool.'

'There is no folly in fancying me,' said Charles, sharply. 'I have good looks, have seen the world, and compare with the louts here as wheat with rye. Many a woman has lost her heart to a younger man than herself.'

'Charles, you must be plain and rough with her if this be so—though I can scarce believe it.'

'No one forces you to believe it. But

don't you think I'm going to make Mrs. Veale your sister-in-law. I'm too wide-awake for that. She is ugly, and—she's a bad un. Yes,' musingly, 'she *is* a bad un.'

Then he worked his heel more vigorously in the hole. 'Take care what you are about, Charles, you are breaking the slate, and making what was bad, worse.'

'I wish I had Mrs. Veale's heart under that there stone,' said Charles, viciously. 'I'd grind my heel into it till I'd worked through it. You don't know how uncomfortable she makes me.'

'Well, keep her at arm's length.'

'I can't do it. She won't let me. She runs after me as a cat after a milk-maid.'

'Surely, Charles, you can just put a stop to that.'

'I suppose I must.'

He continued, in spite of remonstrance, grinding through the broken slate into the

earth. His face was hot and red. He put his elbow up, and wiped his brow on his sleeve.

'It is cursed warm here,' he said at last.

'Then keep away from the fire. I'm glad you have come to see me, Charles; I always wish you well.'

'Oh, for the matter of that I only came here to be out of the way of Mrs. Veale.'

Then Honor laughed. 'Really, Charles, this is childish.'

'It is not kind of you to laugh,' said he, sulkily; 'you do not know what it is to have your head turned, and to feel yourself pulled about and drawn along against your will. It is like "oranges and lemons," as we played at school, when you are on the weakest side.'

'Whither can Mrs. Veale draw you? Not to the altar rails, surely.'

'Oh no! not to the altar-rails. Mrs. Veale is a bad un.'

His manner puzzled Honor. She was convinced he was not telling her everything.

'What is it, Charles?' she said; 'you may give me your confidence. Tell me all that troubles you. What is behind? I know you are keeping back something from me. If I can advise and help you, I will do so. I am your nearest sister.' Then she put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

'Don't do that,' said he, roughly. 'I hate scenes, sisterly affection and motherly counsel, and all that sort of batter-pudding without egg and sugar. I reckon I am outgrown that long ago. I have been a soldier and know the world. If you think to pin me to your apron, as you have pinned father, you are mightily mistaken. No; I will tell you no more, only this—don't be surprised if I leave Langford. Ninepence a day is not enough to hold me.'

'Oh, Charles, I entreat you to stay. You have regular work there and regular pay. As for Mrs. Veale——'

'Curse Mrs. Veale!' interrupted Charles, and with a stamp of his iron-shod heel he

broke the corners of the slate slab. Then he stood up.

'Look here, Honor. I mustn't forget a message. Old Langford wants to see my father mighty particular, and he is to come up to the house to have a talk with him. He told me so himself, and indeed sent me here. Father is to come up this evening, as he is not at home now. You will remember to send him, Honor?'

'Yes,' she answered, bending her face over her work, 'yes, I shall not forget, Charles.'

Her brother had not the faintest suspicion that his master was a suitor for Honor's hand. Mrs. Veale knew it, but she did not tell him. She had reasons for not doing so.

'Ninepence per diem!' muttered the young man, standing in the doorway. 'That makes fourpence for ale, and fourpence for baccy, and a penny for clothing. T'aint reasonable. I won't stand it. I reckon I'll be off.'

Then, after a moment of irresolution, he

came back into the middle of the room, and, taking Honor's head between his hands, said in an altered tone, as he kissed her, 'After all, you are a good girl. Don't be angry if I spoke sharp. I'm that ruffled I don't know what I say, or what I do. You mayn't be a proper Luxmore in spirit—that is, not like father and me—but you are hard-working, and so I forgive you in a Christian spirit. As Mrs. Veale says, even the Chosen People must have Gibeonites to hew wood and draw water for them. After I am gone, look under the china dog on the mantel-shelf.'

Then he went hastily away.

Honor shuddered. His breath smelt of brandy.

Half an hour later, Oliver Luxmore came in. Then Honor told him that Charles had been to the house with a message for him from Mr. Langford. Oliver rubbed his head and looked forlorn. He knew as well as his daughter what this meant.

'I suppose,' said he, in a timid, questioning tone. 'I suppose, Honor, you have not thought better of what we was discussing together? No doubt Mr. Langford is impatient for his answer.'

'No doubt,' answered the girl.

'You haven't reconsidered your difficulty in the matter? It seems to me—but then I am nobody, though your father—it seems to me that if there be no prior attachment, as folks call it—and you assure me there is none—there can't be great hardship in taking him. Riches and lands are not bad things; and, Honor, it is worth considering that in this world we never can have everything we desire. Providence always mixes the portions we are given to sup.'

'Yes, father, that is true. I am content with that put to my lips. It is sweet, for I have your love, and the love of all my brothers and sisters. Charles has been here, and he kissed me as he never kissed me before. That

makes nine lumps of sugar in my cup. If there be a little bitterness, what then?'

'Well, Honor, you must decide. We cannot drive you, and you count our wishes as nought.'

He was seated, rubbing his hands, then his hair, and turning his head from side to side in a feeble, forlorn, irresolute manner. Honor was sorry for his disappointment, but not inclined to yield.

'Father dear, consider. If I did take Mr. Langford, he would not receive you and all the darlings into Langford house as well—and I will not be parted from you. Who takes me takes all the hive. I am the queen-bee.'

'I will ask,' said the carrier, breathing freer. 'I can but ask. He can but refuse; besides, it will look better, putting the refusal on his hands. It may be that he will not object. There be a lot o' rooms, for sure, at Langford he makes no use of; and I dare say he might accommodate us. There be one, I

know, full o' apples, and another of onions, and I dare say he keeps wool in a third.'

Honor, who was standing by the fire, started, and said hastily, with shaking voice, 'You misunderstand me, father. On no account will I take him. No—on no conditions whatever.' Her hand was on the mantelshelf, and as it shook with her emotion she touched and knocked over a china dog spotted red, a rude chimney ornament. A piece of folded paper fell at her feet. She stooped and picked it up. It was a five-pound note.

She looked at it at first without perceiving what it was, as her mind was occupied. But presently she saw what it was that she held, and then she looked at it with perplexity, and after a moment with uneasiness, and changed colour.

'Father!' she said, 'here is a five-pound note of the Exeter and Plymouth Bank, left by Charles. What does it mean? How can he have got it? Before he parted from me, he

said something about looking under the china dog, but I gave no heed to his words; his breath smelt of spirits, and I thought he spoke away from his meaning. His manner was odd. Father! wherever can Charles have got the money? Oh, father! I hope all is right.'

She put her hand to her heart; a qualm of fear came over her.

'Right! Of course it is right,' said the carrier. 'Five pounds! Why that will come in handy. It will go towards the cost of the horse if you persist. As for these lambs, he ought to pay me for them, but I don't like to press it, as I hear he won't allow it was his dog killed them, and he swears Hillary shot Rover out of spite, and lays the lamb-killing on the dog unjustly. Well, Honor, I suppose you must have your own way; but it is hard on Charles and me, who work as slaves—we who by rights should be squires.'

CHAPTER XXI.

REFUSED!

THE carrier walked slowly and reluctantly to Langford. He was uncomfortable with the answer he had to take to Taverner Langford. Oliver was a kindly man, ready to oblige any one, shrinking from nothing so sensitively as from a rough word and an angry mood. 'It would have saved a lot of trouble,' said he to himself, 'if Honor had given way. I shouldn't have been so out of countenance now —and it does seem an ungrateful thing after the loan of the horse.'

He found Langford in his parlour at his desk. The old man spun round on his seat.

'Ah, ha!' said he, 'come at my call, father-in-law. Well—when is the wedding to be?'

The carrier stood stupidly looking at him, rubbing his hands together and shifting from foot to foot. 'The wedding!'

'Yes, man, the wedding; when is it to be?'

'The wedding!' repeated Oliver, looking through the window for help. 'I'm sure I don't know.'

'You must find that out. I'm impatient to be married. Ha, ha! what faces the Nanspians will pull, father and son, when they see me lead from church a blooming, blushing bride.'

'Well, now,' said the carrier, wiping the perspiration from his brow, 'I'm sorry to have to say it, but Honor don't see it in the proper light.'

'What—refuses me?'

'Not exactly refuses, but begs off.'

'Begs off!' repeated Taverner, incredulously. He could hardly have been more disconcerted if he had heard that all his cattle were dying and his stacks blazing. 'Begs off!'

he again exclaimed; 'then how about my horse?'

The carrier scratched his head and sighed.

'Do you suppose that I gave you the horse?' said Taverner. 'You can hardly have been such a fool as that. I am not one to give a cow here, and a sheep there, and a horse to a third, just because there are so many needy persons wanting them. You must return me the horse and pay me ten shillings a week for the hire during the time you have had him, unless Honor becomes my wife.'

'I will pay you for the horse,' said Luxmore, faintly.

'Whence will you get the money? Do you think I am a fool?' asked Langford, angrily. His pride was hurt. His eyes flashed and his skin became of a livid complexion. He, the wealthiest man in Bratton Clovelly; he, the representative of the most respectable family there—one as old as the parish itself; he, the parson's churchwarden, and the elder

of the Methodist chapel—he had been refused by a poverty-stricken carrier's daughter. The insult was unendurable. He stood up to leave the room, but when he had his hand on the latch he turned and came back. In the first access of wrath he had resolved to crush the carrier. He could do it. He had but to take back his horse, and the Vivid was reduced to a stationary condition. Luxmore might offer to buy the horse, but he could not do it. He knew how poor he was. Moreover, he could cut his business away from him at any moment by setting up the cripple as carrier.

But he thought better of it. Of what avail to him if Luxmore were ruined? He desired to revenge himself on the Nanspians. The carrier was too small game to be hunted down, he was set on the humiliation of much bigger men than he. His envy and hatred of the Nanspians had by no means abated, and the killing of his dog Rover by young Hillary had excited it to frenzy. That his dog was a sheep-

killer would not excuse Larry's act. He did not allow that Rover was the culprit. His nephew had shot the dog out of malice, and had feigned as an excuse that he had caught the dog pursuing lambs.

The wealthy yeoman might certainly, without difficulty, have found another girl less hard to please than Honor. All girls would not have thought with her. His money would have weighed with them. He could not understand his refusal. 'What is the matter with the girl?' he said surlily. 'I thought her too wise to be in love. She has not set her heart on any boyish jackanapes, has she?'

'Honor? Oh no! Honor has no sweetheart,' said the father. 'It certainly is not that, Mr. Langford.'

'Then what is it? What possible objection can she make? I'm not a beardless boy and a rosy-faced beauty, that is true.'

'No, Mr. Langford, I am sure she has not a word against your age and personal appear-

ance. Indeed, a young girl generally prefers as a husband one to whom she can look up, who is her superior in every way.'

'I am that. What is it, then?'

'Well, Mr. Langford,' said the carrier, drawing the back of his hand across his lips, 'I think it is about this. She don't like to desert me and the children. She promised her mother to stand by us, and Honor is so conscientious that what she has promised she will stick to.'

'Oh,' said Taverner, somewhat mollified to find that neither his age nor lack of beauty was objected to, 'that is it, is it?'

'Yes, sir,' answered the carrier, sheepishly; 'you see there are six little uns; then comes Kate, and then Charles, and then I. That makes nine of us Honor has to care for. And,' he said more eagerly, heaving a sigh of relief, 'you see, she didn't think it quite a fair thing to saddle you with us all, with Pattie and Joe, Willie, Martha, Charity, Temperance, Kate,

Charles, and myself. It does make a lot when you come to consider.'

It did certainly, as Taverner admitted. He had no intention whatever of incumbering himself with Honor's relations, if he did marry her. He took a turn up and down the room, with his heavy dark brows knit and his thin lips screwed together. Oliver watched his face, and thought that it was a very ugly and ill-tempered face.

'It does Honor some credit having such delicacy of feeling,' suggested he. 'I very much doubt how you could accommodate us all in this house.'

'I do not see how I could possibly do it,' said Taverner, sharply.

'And Honor couldn't think to tear herself away from us. I suppose you wouldn't consider the possibility of coming to us?'

'No, I would not.'

Taverner Langford was perplexed. He entirely accepted Oliver's explanation. It was

quite reasonable that Honor should refuse him out of a high sense of duty; it was not conceivable that she should decline alliance with him on any other grounds. Now, although Taverner had not hitherto found time or courage to marry, he was by no means insensible to female beauty. He had long observed the stately, upright daughter of the carrier, with her beautiful abundant auburn hair and clear brown eyes. He had observed her more than she supposed, and he had seen how hard-working, self-devoted she was, how economical, how clean in her own person and in her house. Such a woman as that would be more agreeable in the house than Mrs. Veale. He would have to pay her no wage for one thing, her pleasant face and voice would be a relief after the sour visage and grating tones of the housekeeper. He knew perfectly that Mrs. Veale had had designs on him from the moment she had entered his house. She had flattered, slaved; she had assumed an amount of authority in the house hardly

consistent with her position. Langford had not resisted her encroachments; he allowed her to cherish hopes of securing him in the end, as a means of ensuring her fidelity to his interests. He chuckled to himself at the thought of the rage and disappointment that would consume her when he announced that he was about to be married.

He was a suspicious man, and he mistrusted every woman, but he mistrusted Honor less than any woman or man he knew. He had observed no other with half the attention he had devoted to her, and he had never seen in her the smallest tokens of frivolity and indifference to duty. If she was so scrupulous in the discharge of her obligations to father and sisters, how dependable she would be in her own house, when working and saving for husband and children of her own.

She was no idler, she was no talker, and Taverner hated idleness and gossip. Of what other girl in Bratton Clovelly could as much be

said? No, he would trust his house and happiness to no other than Honor Luxmore.

Taverner dearly loved money, but he loved mastery better. A wife with a fortune of her own would have felt some independence, but a wife who brought him nothing would not be disposed to assert herself. She would look up to him as the exclusive author of her happiness, and never venture to contradict him, never have a will of her own.

'If that be her only objection, it may be circumvented,' said Langford, 'if not got over. I thought, perhaps, she declined my hand from some other cause.'

'What other cause could there be?' asked Oliver.

'To be sure there is no other that should govern a rational creature; but few women are rational. I have done something for you already, for you have my horse. I have done a good deal for Charles also; I pay him ninepence a day and give him his food. It is quite

possible that I may do a vast deal for the rest of you. But of course that depends. I'm not likely to take you up and make much of you unless you are connected with me by marriage. You can judge for yourself. Should I be likely to leave you all unprovided for if Honor were Mrs. Langford? Of course I would not allow it to be said that my wife's relations were in need.'

These words of Taverner Langford made Oliver's pulse beat fast.

'And then,' continued the yeoman, 'who can say but that I might give you a hand to help you into Coombe Park.'

Luxmore's eye kindled, and his cheeks became dappled with fiery spots. Here was a prospect! but it was like the prospect of the Promised Land to Moses on Pisgah if Honor proved unyielding.

'You are the girl's father,' said Langford. 'Hoity-toity! I have no patience with a man

who allows his daughter to give herself airs. He knows what is best for her, and must decide. Make her give way.'

Oliver would have laughed aloud at the idea of his forcing his daughter's will into compliance with his own, had not the case been so serious.

'Look here, Mr. Langford,' he said. 'I'll do what I can. I'll tell Honor the liberal offer you have made; and I trust she'll see it aright and be thankful.' He stood up. 'Before I go,' he said, producing the five-pound note, 'I'd just like to reduce my debt to you for the horse, if you please.'

'How much?' asked Taverner.

'Five pounds,' answered the carrier. 'If I kept it by me I should spend it, so I thought best to bring it straight to you. You'll give me a slip o' paper as a receipt.'

Langford took out his pocket-book, folded the note, and put it in the pocket of the book;

then made a pencil entry. I always,' said he, 'enter every note I receive with its number. Comes useful at times for reference. To be sure, you shall have a receipt.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HAYSEL.

HILLARY became impatient. He made no way with Honor; if any change in his position had taken place, he had gone back. In spite of her entreaty, he went to the cottage down the lane hooting like an owl, but she did not answer the call. Then he plucked up courage and went in on the chance of getting a word with her alone, but he went in vain. Oliver Luxmore was glad to see him, chatted with him, and offered him a place at their supper-board, or a drink of cider. He defended himself against the sallies of Kate. He spoke now and then to Honor, and was answered in friendly tone; but that was all. If by chance

he met her during the day in the lane or on the down, and she could not escape him, she would not stay to talk, she pleaded work. Hillary was disappointed, and, what was more, offended. His vanity was hurt, and vanity in a young man is his most sensitive fibre. No other girl in the parish would treat his advances as did Honor. The other girls laid themselves out to catch him, Honor shrank from him. He knew that she liked him, he was angry because she did not love him.

Hillary's nature, though sound, was marred by his bringing up. He had been spoiled by flattery and indulgence. His father's boasting, the great expectations held out to him, the consciousness of vigour, health, and good looks, combined to make Larry consider himself the very finest young fellow, not in Bratton only, but in all England. Self-conceit is like mercury, when it touches gold it renders it dull, and a strong fire is needed to expel the alloy and restore the gold to its proper brilliancy.

Mortified in his self-consequence, stung by Honor's indifference, after a few attempts and failures Hillary changed his tactics. He resolved to show Honor, if she did not meet him, he could turn elsewhere. Unfortunately, Kate was at hand to serve his purpose. Kate did not particularly care for Larry. She had a fancy for Samuel Voaden, the farmer's son at Swaddledown; but of this Honor neither knew nor suspected anything. Kate was pleased to see Hillary whenever he came, as she was glad to have a butt for her jokes, and with feminine ingenuity used him to throw dust in the eyes of her father, sister, and companions to obscure their perception of her attachment for Sam Voaden.

At first Hillary was in a bad temper, disinclined for conversation, and unable to retaliate upon Kate; but by degrees his old cheerfulness returned, and he received and replied to her banter with what readiness he possessed.

One day he came into the cottage with a

hay-fork over his shoulder. 'You maidens,' he said, 'come along to the hay-field. We want help badly. Bring the little ones and let them romp and eat cake. Whilst the sun shines we must make hay.'

Honor, without a word, rose and folded her work.

'If you can toss hay as you can toss chaff,' said the young man addressing Kate, 'you will be useful indeed.'

'Larry, it is reported that your uncle Langford will not save hay till it has been rained on well. "If it be too good," he argues, "the cows will eat too much of it." Your wit is ricked like Langford's hay; it is weak and washed out. A little goes a long way with those who taste it.'

A happy and merry party in the hayfield, women and girls tossing the hay into cocks, and the men with the waggon collecting it and carrying it home. The air was fragrant with the scent. In a corner under a hedge were a

barrel of cider, and blue and white mugs, and a basketful of saffron-cake. Whoever was thirsty went to the cider cask, whoever was hungry helped himself to the plum loaf. The field rang with laughter, and occasional screams, as a man twisted a cord of hay, cast the loop round a girl's neck, drew her head towards him and kissed her face. That is called 'the making of sweet hay.'

Honor worked steadily. No one ventured to make 'sweet hay' with her, and Kate was too much on the alert, though one or two young men slyly crept towards her with twisted bands. The little ones were building themselves nests of hay, and burying one another, and jumping over haycocks, and chasing each other with bands, to catch and kiss, in imitation of their elders. Hillary turned in his work and looked at Honor and Kate, hoping that the former would commend his diligence, and that the latter would give him occasion for a joke. But Honor was too much engrossed in her raking,

and had too little idea of necessary work being lauded as a virtue; and the latter was looking at Samuel Voaden, who had come over from Swaddledown to help his neighbour—the haysel at home being over.

When the half-laden waggon drew up near where Honor was raking, Hillary said to her in a low tone, 'I have been working ever since the dew was off the grass.'

'I suppose so, Larry.'

'I have been working very hard.'

'Of course you have, Larry.'

'And I am very hot.'

'I do not doubt it.'

'How cool you are, Honor!'

'I—cool!' she looked at him with surprise. 'On the contrary, I am very warm.' She had no perception that he pleaded for praise.

'Larry,' said Kate, 'you were right to press us into service. It will rain to-morrow.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because you are working to-day.'

Quick as thought, he threw some hay strands round her head, and kissed both her rosy cheeks.

Kate drew herself away, angry at his impudence, especially angry at his kissing her before Samuel Voaden. She threw down her pitchfork ('heable' in the local dialect), and folding her arms, said with a frown and a pout, 'Do the rest yourself. I will work for you no more.'

'Oh, Kate, do not take offence. I went naturally where was the sweetest hay.'

In her anger she looked prettier than when in good humour. She glanced round out of the corners of her eyes, and saw to her satisfaction that Samuel was on the further side of the waggon, unconscious of what had taken place. Hillary was humble, he made ample apology, and offered lavish flattery. Kate maintained, or affected to maintain, her anger for some time, and forced Larry to redouble his efforts to regain

her favour. Her fair hair, fine as silk just wound from a cocoon, was ruffled over her brow, and her brow was pearled with heat-drops. She was a slender girl, with a long neck and the prettiest shoulders in the world. She wore a light gown, frilled about the throat and bosom and sleeves, tucked up at the side, showing a blue petticoat and white stockings. She picked up the 'heable' with a sigh, and then stood leaning on it, with the sleeves fallen back, exposing her delicate arms as far as the rosy elbows.

It was not possible for Kate to remain long angry with Larry, he was so good-natured, so full of fuss, so coaxing; he paid such pretty compliments, his eyes were so roguish, his face so handsome—besides, Samuel was on the other side of the waggon, seeing, hearing nothing.

The dimples formed in her cheeks, the contraction of lips and brows gave way, the angry sparkle disappeared from her blue eyes,

and then her clear laugh announced that she was pacified. Hillary, knowing he had conquered, audacious in his pride of conquest, put his arm round her waist, stooped, and kissed the bare arm nearest him that rested on the pitchfork, then he sprang aside as she attempted to box his ears.

Honor was hard by and had seen both kisses, and had heard every word that had passed. She continued her work as though unconscious. For a moment, a pang of jealousy contracted her bosom, but she hastily mastered it. She knew that she could not, must not regard Hillary in any other light than as a brother, and yet she was unable to see her sister supplanting her in his affections without some natural qualms. But Honor was unselfish, and she hid her suffering. Kate as little suspected the state of her sister's heart as Honor suspected Kate's liking for Sam Voaden. And now, all at once, an idea shot through Honor's mind which crimsoned her

face. How she had misread Hillary's manner when they were together watching for the lamb-killer! She had fancied then that his heart was drawing towards her, and the thought had filled her with unutterable happiness. Now she saw his demeanour in another aspect. He really loved Kate, and his affection for her was only a reflection of his love for the younger sister. He had sought to gain her esteem, to forward his suit with Kate. When this thought occurred to Honor, she hid her face, humbled and distressed at having been deluded by self-conceit. She made it clear to herself now that Hillary had thought only of Kate. Her sister had said nothing to her about Hillary—but was that wonderful, as he had not declared himself? A transient gleam had lightened her soul. It was over. Work was Honor's lot in life, perhaps sorrow, not love.

'The last load is carried, and in good order. Where is the dance to be?' asked Samuel

Voaden, coming into sight as the waggon moved on.

'In the barn,' answered Hillary.

'Kate,' said Hillary, 'give me the first dance.'

'And me the second,' pleaded Samuel.

When Combe wrote and Rowlandson illustrated the 'Tour of Doctor Syntax,' a dance was the necessary complement of a harvest whether of corn or hay—especially of the latter, as then the barn was empty. The Reverend Doctor Syntax thought it not derogatory to his office to play the fiddle on such occasions. Moreover, half a century ago, the village fiddler was invited into any cottage, when, at the sound of his instrument, lads and maidens would assemble, dance for a couple of hours and disperse before darkness settled in. The denunciation of dancing as a deadly sin by the Methodists has caused it to fall into desuetude. Morality has not been bettered thereby. The young people who formerly met

by daylight on the cottage floor, now meet, after chapel, in the dark, in hedge corners.

Hillary and Samuel had engaged Kate. Neither had thought of Honor, though she stood by, raking the fragrant hay.

'Up, up!' shouted both young men. 'Kate, you must ride on the last load.'

The waggon moved away, with Kate mounted on the sweet contents, and with the young men running at the side. Honor remained alone, looking after them, resting on her rake, and, in spite of her efforts, the tears filled her eyes.

But she did not give way to her emotion.

Honor called the children, when the last load left the field, and led them home. She was hot and tired, and her heart ached, but she was content with herself. She had conquered the rising movement of jealousy, and was ready to accept Hillary as her sister's acknowledged lover.

Kate followed her. An hour later the

dance in the barn would begin. The lads and maidens went home to smarten up, and wash off the dust and stain of labour, and the barn had to be decorated with green branches, and the candles lit.

Kate went upstairs at once to dress. Honor remained below to hear the children's prayers, and get the youngest ready for bed. Then she went up to the room she shared with Kate, carrying little Temperance in her arms.

'Oh, Honor, bundle them all in. What a time you have been! We shall be late; and I have promised to open the dance with Larry.'

'I am not going, Kate.'

'Not going! Of course you are going.'

'No, I am not. Father is not home, and will want his supper. Besides, I cannot leave the house with all the little ones in it unprotected.'

'There are no ogres hereabouts that eat children,' said Kate, hastily. 'We can manage. This is nonsense; you must come.'

'I do not care to, Kate. Sit down in that chair, and I will dress your hair. It is tossed like a haycock.'

Kate seated herself, and Honor combed and brushed her sister's hair, then put a blue riband through it; and took the kerchief from her box, and drew it over Kate's shoulders, and pinned it in place.

'Oh, Honor! What a lovely silk kerchief! Where did you get this? How long have you had it? Why have you not shown it me before?'

'It is for you, dearest Kate; I am glad you like it.'

Kate stood up, looked at herself in the glass, and then threw her arms round her sister and kissed her.

'You are a darling,' exclaimed Kate. 'Always thinking of others, never giving yourself anything. Let me remain at home—do you go instead of me.'

Honor shook her head. She was pleased to

see Kate's delight, but there was an undercurrent of sadness in her soul. She was adorning her sister for Hillary.

Kate did not press Honor to go instead of her, though she was sufficiently good-hearted to have taken her sister's place without becoming ill-tempered, had Honor accepted the offer.

'Do I look very nice?' asked Kate, with the irresistible dimples coming into her cheeks. 'I wonder what Larry will say when he sees me with this blue ribbon, and this pretty kerchief.'

'And I—' said Honor slowly, not without effort, 'I also wonder.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BRAWL.

When Kate came to the barn, she found it decorated with green boughs. There were no windows, only the great barn door, consequently the sides were dark; but here four lanterns had been hung, diffusing a dull yellow light. The threshing-floor was in the middle, planked; on either side the barn was slated, so that the dancing was to be in the middle. Forms were placed on the slate flooring for those who rested or looked on. On a table sat the fiddler with a jug of cider near him.

The season of the year was that of Barnaby bright, when, as the old saw says, there is all day and no night. The sun did not set till past

eight, and then left the north-west full of silver light. The hedgerows, as Kate passed between them, streamed forth the fragrance from the honeysuckle which was wreathed about them in masses of flower, apricot-yellow, and pink. Where the incense of the eglantine ceased to fill the air it was burdened with the sweetness of white clover that flowered thickly over the broad green patches of grass by the road-side.

Hillary was awaiting Kate to open the dance with her. He had gone to the gate to meet her; he recognised his kerchief at once; he was surprised and hurt. Why was Honor not there? Kate came with her little brother Joe holding her hand. Joe had begged permission to attend the dance. Why had Honor made over Larry's present to her sister? It was a slight, an intentional slight. Larry bit his lips and frowned; his heart beat fast with angry emotion. He approached Kate with an ungracious air, and led her to the dance without a pleasant word.

Kate was unquestionably the prettiest girl present. She held her fair head erect, in consciousness of superiority. Her hair was abundant, full of natural wave and curl, and the sky-blue ribbon in it seemed to hold it together, and to be the only restraining power that prevented it breaking loose and enveloping her from head to foot in the most beautiful gloss silk. Her complexion was that of the wild rose, heightened by her rapid walk and by excitement; her eyes were blue as the forget-me-not.

The evening sun shone in at the barn door, as yellow, but purer and brighter than the lantern light. Had there been a painter present he would have seized the occasion to paint the pretty scene—the old barn with oaken timbers, its great double doors open, from under a penthouse roof leaning forward to cover the laden wains as they were being unpacked of their corn-sheaves; the depths of the barn dark as night, illumined feebly by the pendent lanterns; and the midst, the threshing-

floor, crowded with dancers, who flickered in the saffron glow of the setting sun.

Kate noticed that Hillary, whilst he danced with her, observed the kerchief intently.

'Is it not pretty?' she asked innocently. 'Honor gave it me. She had kept it for me in her box ever since the Revel, and not told me that she had it; nor did I see her buy it then. Honor is so good, so kind.'

Hillary said nothing in reply, but his humour was not improved. His mind wandered from his partner.

'When is Honor coming?' he asked abruptly.

'She is not coming at all.'

'Why not?'

'Father is not home, and will want his supper when he does return.'

'Honor must do all the drudging whilst others dance,' he said peevishly.

'I offered to stay and let her come, but she would not hear of it.'

Hillary danced badly; he lost step. He excused himself; but Kate was dissatisfied with her partner, he was dull, and she was displeased to see that Sam Voaden was dancing and laughing and enjoying himself with some one else.

'You are a clumsy partner,' she said, 'and dance like old Diamond when backing against a load going down hill.'

'Honor gave you that kerchief? What did she say when she gave it you?'

'Nothing.'

He said no more, and led her to a bench in the side of the barn.

'What! tired already, Larry? I am not.'

'I am,' he answered sulkily.

Directly, Sam Voaden came to her, and was received with smiles.

'Larry Nanspian came left leg foremost out of bed this morning,' she said. 'He is as out of tune as Piper's fiddle.'

Kate was in great request that evening. The lads pressed about her, proud to circle

round the floor with the graceful pretty girl; but she gave the preference to Samuel Voaden. Hillary asked her to dance with him in 'The Triumph,' but she told him sharply she would reserve her hand for him in the Dumps, and he did not ask her again.

The girls present looked at Kate with envy. They were unable to dispute her beauty; but her charm of manner and lively wit made her even more acceptable to the lads than her good looks. She was perfectly conscious of the envy and admiration she excited, and as much gratified with one as with the other.

Samuel Voaden was infatuated. He pressed his attentions, and Kate received them with pleasure. As she danced past Larry she cast him glances of contemptuous pity.

Hillary was angry with Honor, angry with Kate, angry with himself. The spoiled prince was cast aside by two girls—a common carrier's daughters. He was as irritated against Kate now as he was previously against Honor.

When he heard Kate laugh, he winced, suspecting that she was joking about him. His eyes followed the kerchief, and his heart grew bitter within him. He made no attempt to be amusing. He had nothing to say to any one. He let the dances go on without seeking partners. He stood lounging against the barn door, with a sprig of honeysuckle in his mouth, and his hands behind his back.

The sun was set, a cool grey light suffused the meadow, the stackyard, the barn, the groups who stood about, and the dancers within.

A dog ventured in at the door, and he kicked it out.

The dog snarled and barked, and he nearly quarrelled with young Voaden because the latter objected to his dog being kicked.

Then, all at once, his mood changed. It occurred to him that very probably Honor stayed away just for the purpose of showing him she did not care for him. If that were so, he would let her know that he was not to be

put out of heart by her slights. He would not afford her the gratification of hearing through her sister that he was dispirited and unhappy. Then he dashed into the midst of the girls, snatched a partner, and thenceforth danced and laughed and was uproariously merry.

At ten o'clock the dancing was over. Country folk kept early hours then; the cider barrel was run out, the basket of cakes emptied, and the tallow lights in the lanterns burnt down to a flicker in a flood of melted grease.

The young men prepared to escort their partners home.

Hillary saw that Samuel was going with Kate. He was exasperated to the last degree. He did not care particularly for Kate, but he did care that it should not be talked of in the village that Sam Voaden had plucked her away from under his very nose. Gossip gave her to him as a sweetheart, and gossip would make merry over his discomfiture. Besides, he wanted an

excuse for going to the cottage and having an explanation with Honor about the kerchief.

As Voaden's dog passed in front of him at a call from his master, Larry kicked it.

'Leave my dog alone, will you!' shouted Samuel. 'That is the second time you have kicked Punch. The dog don't hurt you, why should you hurt him?'

'I shall kick the brute if I choose,' said Hillary. 'It has no right here in the barn.'

'What harm has Punch done? And now, what is against his leaving?'

'You had no right to bring the dog here. It has been in the plantation after young game.'

'Punch is wrong whether in the barn or out of it. The guinea you got for shooting Rover has given you a set against dogs seemingly,' said young Voaden.

'The dog took your lambs at Swaddledown, and you were too much a lie-a-bed to stop it,' sneered Hillary.

'Some folk,' answered Samuel, 'have everything in such first-rate order at home they can spare time to help their neighbours.'

'No more!' exclaimed Kate; 'you shall not quarrel.'

Hillary looked round. Near him were two women who had been in the van when he returned from Tavistock with the kerchief. They, no doubt, recognised it over Kate's shoulders. They made sure it was his love-token to her, and, wearing it, she was about to affront him in their eyes. His wounded vanity made him blind to what he said or did.

'Here, Kate,' he said, thrusting himself forward, 'I am going to take you home. You cannot go with Samuel. His cursed Punch is an ill-conditioned brute, and will kill your chickens.'

'Nonsense,' laughed Kate, 'our chickens are all under cover.'

'I'll fight you,' said Hillary, turning to Samuel. 'Kate was engaged to me for the

Tank,[1] and you carried her off without asking leave. I will not be insulted by you on my father's land, and under my own roof. If you are a man you will fight me.'

'Nonsense, Larry,' answered Samuel, good-humouredly, 'I'll not quarrel with you. It takes two to make a quarrel, as it takes two to kiss.'

'You are afraid, that is why.'

'I am not afraid of you, Larry,' said Samuel. 'You are as touchy this evening as if whipped with nettles.'

'Come with me, Kate,' exclaimed Hillary. 'You have known me longer than Voaden. If he chooses to take you, he must fight me first.'

'I will not fight you, Larry,' answered the young Swaddledown farmer; 'but I don't object to a fling with you, if you will wrestle.'

'Very well; throw off your coat.'

The young men removed their jackets,

[1] An old country dance.

waistcoats, and the handkerchiefs from their throats. They were both fine fellows—well-built and strong. Those who had been dancing surrounded them in a ring, men and maids.

'Cornish fashion, not Devon,' said Samuel.

'Ay, ay!' shouted the bystanders, 'Cornish wrestle now.'

'Right—Cornish,' answered Hillary.

The difference between Devon and Cornish wrestling consists in this, that in a Devon wrestle kicking is admissible; but then, as a protection to their shins, the antagonists have their legs wreathed with haybands (*vulgo* skillibegs). As the legs were on this occasion unprotected, Devon wrestling was inadmissible. Both fashions were in vogue near the Tamar, and every young man would wrestle one way or the other as decided beforehand.

The opponents fixed each other with their eyes, and stood breathless, and every voice was hushed. Instantaneously, as moved by one

impulse, they sprang at each other, and were writhing, tossing, coiling in each other's embrace. Neither could make the other budge from his ground, or throw him, exerting his utmost strength and skill. The haymakers stood silent, looking on appreciatively—the girls a little frightened, the men relishingly, relishing it more than the dance. Not one of the lads at that moment had a thought to cast at his partner. Their hands twitched, their feet moved, they bent, threw themselves back, swung aside, responsive to the movements of the wrestlers.

The antagonists gasped, snorted, as with set teeth and closed lips they drew long inspirations through their nostrils. Their sweat poured in streams from their brows.

Simultaneously, moved by one impulse, they let go their hold, and stood quivering and wiping their brows, with labouring breasts; then, with a shout, closed again.

'Ho!' a general exclamation. In the first

grapple Hillary had slipped, and gone down on one knee. Immediately Samuel let go.

'There!' said he, holding out his hand. 'We have had enough. Strike palms, old boy.'

'No,' gasped Hillary, blazing with anger and shame. 'I was not flung. I slipped on the dockleaf there. I will not allow myself beaten. Come on again.'

'I will not do so,' answered Samuel. 'If you have not had enough, I have.'

'You shall go on. You are a coward to sneak out now when an accident gave you advantage.'

'Very well, then,' said Samuel; 'but you have lost your temper, and I'll have no more than this round with you.'

The young men were very equally matched. They grappled once more, twisted, doubled, gasped; the ground was torn up under their feet. As the feet twirled and flew, it was hard to say how many were on the ground at once, and whose they were.

Samuel suddenly caught his antagonist over the arms, and pushed them to his side.

'He'll have Larry down! he will, by George!' shouted several. 'Well done, Samuel! Go it, Samuel Voaden!'

'Ha!' shouted Sam, starting back. 'Who goes against rules? You kicked.'

'You lie! I did not.'

'You did! you did, Larry,' shouted three or four of the spectators. It was true; in his excitement Larry had forgotten that he and his opponent were without skillibegs and wrestling in Cornish fashion, and he had kicked; but in good faith he had denied doing it, for he was unconscious of his actions, so blinded and bemuzzed was he with anger, disappointment, and shame.

'I'll not wrestle any more,' said Samuel, 'if you don't wrestle fair. No—I won't at all. You are in a white fury. So—if it's unfair in you to kick, it is unfair in me to take advantage of your temper.'

'It is not done. One or other must go down.'

Then Kate pushed forward. 'Neither of you shall attend me home,' she said; 'I am going with little Joe only.'

Whether this would have ended the affray is doubtful. Another interruption was more successful. Suddenly a loud blast of a horn, then a yelping as of dogs, then another blast—and through the yard before the barn, breaking the ring, sweeping between the combatants, passed a strange figure—a man wearing a black bull's hide, with long brown paper ears on his head; the hide was fastened about his waist, and the tail trailed behind. He was followed by a dozen boys barking, baying, yelping, and after them hobbled Tom Crout blowing aorn.

'It's no good,' said the lame fellow, halting in the broken ring; 'I can't follow the hare, Mr. Larry Nanspian; the hunt is waiting for you. On wi' a green coat, and mount your piebald, and take my horn. I wish I could

follow; but it's un-possible. Whew! you hare! Heigh! Piper, stay, will you, and start fair.'

'I'll have nothing to do with it,' said Hillary, still panting.

'That is right, Larry,' said Kate in his ear, 'You oughtn't. Honor said as much, and that she hoped you would keep out of it.'

'Did she!' said Hillary, angrily; 'then I'll go in for it.'

'Larry, old chap,' exclaimed Voaden, patting him on the shoulder, 'I wasn't the better man, nor was you. You slipped on the dock-leaf, and that don't reckon as a fall. We'll have another bout some other day, if you wish it. Now let us have the lark of the Hare Hunt.'

Hillary considered a moment, and wiped his face. He had fallen in the general estimation. He had been sulky, he had provoked Sam, and the wrestle had not turned to his credit. Here was a chance offered of taking the lead once more. If he did not act the huntsman, Sam would.

'All right, Crout,' said he, 'give me the horn; I'll have my horse round directly, and the green coat on.'

'Do not, do not, Larry,' entreated Kate.

'Tell Honor I'm not pinned to her apron,' answered the young man, and ran into the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HAND OF GLORY.

THE reader may have been puzzled by the hints made by Larry to Honor, and by Charles to Mrs. Veale, of a threatened hare hunt, and he may have wondered why such a threat should have disturbed Honor and angered the housekeeper. There are plenty of hares on Broadbury Moor; there have been hare hunts there as long as men could remember; frequently, all through the winter. An ordinary hare hunt would not have stirred much feeling in women's bosoms. The menaced hare hunt was something very different. A stag and a hare hunt are the rude means employed by a village community for maintaining either its

standard of morals or expressing its disapprobation of petticoat rule. The stag hunt is by no means an institution of the past, it flourishes to the present day; and where the magistrates have interfered, this interference has stimulated it to larger proportions. The hare hunt, now extinct, was intended to ridicule the man who submitted to a rough woman's tongue.

The stag hunt takes place either on the wedding-night of a man who has married a girl of light character, or when a wife is suspected of having played her husband false. The hare hunt more properly satirised the relations between Taverner Langford and Mrs. Veale. In not a few cases, especially with a stag hunt, there is gross injustice done. It cannot be otherwise: the Vehm-Gericht is self-constituted, sits in the tavern, and passes its sentence without summons and hearing of the accused. There is no defence and no appeal from the court. The infliction of the sentence

confers an indelible stain, and generally drives those who have been thus branded out of the neighbourhood. Petty spite and private grudges are sometimes so revenged; and a marriage in a well-conducted family, which has held itself above the rest in a parish, is made an occasion for one of these outrages, whereby the envy of the unsuccessful and disreputable finds a vent.

There probably would have been no hare hunt near Langford had not the quarrel between Langford and Nanspian agitated the whole parish, and given occasion for a frolic which would not have been adventured had the brothers-in-law been combined.

'Well, Mr. Charles,' said Mrs. Veale, 'what have you done with the five-pound note I let you have? Is it all spent?'

'I gave it to my father and sister,' answered Charles. 'I've occasioned them some expense, and I thought I'd make it up to them whilst I could.'

'That was mighty liberal of you,' sneered Mrs. Veale.

'I am liberal, pretty free-handed with my money. It comes of my blood.'

'Ah!' said the housekeeper, 'and I reckon now you'll be wanting more.'

'I could do with more,' replied young Luxmore, 'but I will not trouble you.'

'Oh! it's no trouble,' said Mrs. Veale, 'I know very well that lending to you is safe as putting into the Bank of England. You must have your own some day, and when you're squire you won't see me want.'

'Rely on me, I will deal most generously with you. I shall not forget your kindness, Mrs. Veale.'

'But,' said the woman slyly, eyeing him, 'I can't find you as much as you require. You can't spin more out of me than my own weight, as the silkworm said. I've put aside my little savings. But as you see, the master don't pay

freely. He gives you only ninepence, and me ——' she shrugged her shoulders.

'If I were in your place,' she went on, after a pause, 'I should be tempted to borrow a hundred or so, and go to Physick the lawyer with it, and say, help me to Coombe Park, and when I've that, I'll give you a hundred more.'

'Who'd lend me the money? You have not so much.'

'No, I have not so much.'

'What other person would trust me?'

'The money might be had.'

'Others don't see my prospects as you do.'

'I'd be inclined to borrow wi'out asking,' said the housekeeper cautiously. She was as one feeling her way; she kept her eyes on Charles as she talked. Charles st rted. He knew her meaning.

'How dare you suggest such a thing!' he said in a low tone, looking at her uneasily. 'Curse you! Don't wink at me with your white lashes that way, you make me uneasy.'

'I only suggested it,' said Mrs. Veale, turning her head aside. 'I reckon no harm would be done. The master don't know how much he has in his box. We had it out t'other day between us, and counted. There be over a thousand pounds there. Do y' think he counts it every week? Not he. Who'd know? The money would be put back, and wi' interest, six, seven, ten per cent., if you liked, when you'd got Coombe Park.'

'Have done,' said Luxmore with nervous irritation; 'I'm no thief, and never could become one.'

'Who asked you to be one? Not I. I said as how you might become his banker for a hundred pounds. The bank gives but three per cent., and you would give nine. Who'd be the loser? Not master. He'd gain nine pounds without knowing it—and wouldn't he crow!'

Charles Luxmore caught his hat and stood up.

'Where be you going to?' asked Mrs. Veale.

'I cannot stand this,' he said in an agitated voice. 'You torment me. You put notions into me that won't let me sleep, that make me miserable. I shall go.'

'Whither? To the Ring o' Bells. There be no one there to-night, all be away to Chimsworthy at the Haysel. You sit down again, and I will give you some cherry cordial.'

He obeyed sulkily.

'You can't go to dance at Chimsworthy, because you be here at Langford, and there's no dancing and merry-making here. But wait till you're at Coombe Park, and then you'll have junketings and harvest-homes and dances when you will. That'll be a rare life.'

He said nothing, but thrust his hands into his pockets, and looked moodily before him.

'Shall I tell you now who'll find you the money?'

He did not speak.

'Wellon will.'

'What?' he looked up in surprise.

'Ay! old Wellon as was gibbeted, he will.'

Charles laughed contemptuously. 'You are talking folly. I always thought you mad.'

'Did you ever hear of the Hand of Glory?'

'No, never.'

'I wonder what became of Wellon's hand —the hand that throttled Mary Rundle, and stuck the knife into the heart of Jane, and brought down their aunt wi' a blow of the fist. That hand was a mighty hand.'

'Wellon was hung in chains, and fell to dust.'

'But not the hand. Such a hand as that was too precious. Did you never hear it was cut off, and the body swung for years without it?'

'No, I did not.'

'It was so.'

'What good was it to anyone?'

'It was worth pounds and pounds.'

'As a curiosity?'

'No, as a Hand of Glory. It were washed in mother's milk to a child base-born, and smoked in the reek of gallows-wood, and then laid with tamarisk from the sea, and vervain, and rue, and bog-bean.'

'Well, what then?'

'Why, then, sure it's a Hand of Glory.' She pauzed, then struck her hand across her forehead, 'and grass off the graves of them as it killed—I forgot to say that was added.'

'What can such a hand do?'

'Everything. If I had it here and set it up on the mantelshelf, and set a light to the fingers, all would flame blue, and then every soul in the house would sleep except us two, and we might ransack the whole place and none would stir or hinder or see. And if we let the hand flame on, they would lie asleep till we were far away beyond their reach.'

'If you had this Hand of Glory, I wouldn't help you to use it,' said Charles, writhing on his seat.

'That is not all,' Mrs. Veale went on, standing by a little tea-table with her hand on it, the other against her side. 'That hand has wonderful powers of itself. It is as a thing alive, though dead and dry as leather. If you say certain words it begins to run about on its fingers like a rat. Maybe you're sitting over the fire of nights, and hear something stirring, and see a brown thing scuttling over the floor and you think it is a rat. It is not. It is the dead man's hand. Perhaps you hear a scratching on the wall, and look round, and see a great black spider—a monstrous spider going about, running over and over the wainscot, and touching and twitching at the bell wires. It is not a spider, it is the murderer's hand. It hasn't eyes, it goes by the feel, till it comes to gold, and then, at the touch the dark skin becomes light and shines as the tail of a

glowworm, and it picks and gathers by its own light. I reckon, if that hand o' Wellon's were in the oven behind the parlour-grate, it would make such a light that you'd see what was on every guinea, whether the man and horse or the spade, and you could read every note as well as if you had the daylight. Then the ring-finger and the little finger close over what money the hand has been bidden fetch, and it runs away on the thumb and other two—and then, if you will, it's spiderlike with a bag behind.'

'I don't believe a word of it,' said Charles, but his words were more confident than his tone.

'You see,' Mrs. Veale went on, 'there is this about it, you tell the hand to go and fetch the money, but you don't say whither it is to go, and you do not know. You get the money and can swear you have robbed no one. I reckon, mostly the money is found by the hand in old cairns and ruins. I've been told there's a table of gold in Broadbury Castle that only

comes to the top on Midsummer night for an hour, and then sinks again. Folks far away see a great light on Broadbury, and say we be swaling (burning gorse) up here; but it is no such thing; it is the gold table coming up, and shining like fire, and the clouds above reflecting its light.'

'Pity the hand don't break off bits of the gold table,' said Charles sarcastically; but his face was mottled with fear; Mrs. Veale's stories frightened him.

'Yes, 'tis a pity,' she said. 'Maybe it will some day.'

'Pray what do you say to the hand to make it run your errands?'

'Ah!' she continued, without answering his question. 'There be other things the Hand of Glory can do. It will go if you send it to some person—bolts and locks will not keep it out, and it will catch the end of the bedclothes, and scramble up, and pass itself over the eyes of the sleeper, and make him sleep

like a dead man, and it will dive under the clothes and lay its fingers on the heart; then there will come aches and spasms there, or it will creep down the thighs and pinch and pat, and that brings rheumatic pains. I've heard of one hand thus sent as went down under the bedclothes to the bottom of the sleeper's foot, and there it closed up all the fingers but one, and with that it bored and bored, working itself about like a gimblet, and then gangrene set in, and the man touched thus was dead in three days.'

'It is a mighty fortunate thing you've not the hand of old Wellon,' growled Charles.

'I have got it,' answered Mrs. Veale.

Charles looked at her with staring eyes.

'You shall see it,' she said.

'I do not want to. I will not!' he exclaimed, shuddering.

'Wellon's hand will fetch you a hundred pounds, and we will not ask whence it comes,' said Mrs. Veale.

'I will not have it, I will not touch it!' He spoke in a hoarse, horrified whisper.

'You shall come with me, and I will show you where I keep it, and perhaps you will find the hand closed; and when I say, Hand of Glory! open! Hand of Glory! give up! then you will see the fingers unclose, and the glittering gold coins will be in the brown palm.'

'I will not touch them.'

'No harm in your looking at them. Come with me.'

She stood before him with her firm mouth set, and her blinking eyes on him. He tried to resist. He settled himself more comfortably into his seat. But his efforts to oppose her will were in vain. He uttered a curse, drew his hands out of his pocket, put his hat on his head.

'Go on,' he said surlily; 'but I tell y' I won't go without the lantern. Where is it?'

'In Wellon's Cairn.'

'I will not go,' said Charles, drawing back, and all colour leaving his cheek.

'Then I'll send the hand after you. Come.'

'I'll take the lantern.'

'As you like, but hide the light till we get to the hill. There it don't matter if folks see a flame dancing about the mound. They will keep their distance—Come on, after me.'

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HARE HUNT.

Directly Mrs. Veale, followed by Charles, came outside the house the former turned and said, with a chuckle, 'You want a lantern, do y', a summer night such as this?'

The sky was full of twilight, every thorn tree and holly bush was visible on the hedges, every pebble in the yard.

'I'm not going to Wellon's Cairn without,' said Luxmore, sulkily. 'I don't want to go at all; and I won't go *there* without light.'

'Very well. I will wait at the gate for you.'

He went into the stable, where was a horn-sided tin lantern, and took it down from its

crook, then went back into the kitchen and lighted the candle at the fire.

'I've a mind not to go,' he muttered. 'What does the woman want with me, pulling me, driving me, this way and that? If I'd been told I was to be subjected to this sort of persecution, I wouldn't have come here. It's not to be endured for ninepence. Ninepence! It would be bad at eighteen pence. I wish I was in Afghanistan. Cawbul, Ghuznee, Candahar don't astonish her. She ain't open-mouthed at them, but sets my hair on end with her Hand of Glory, and talks of how money is to be got. I know what she is after; she wants me to run away with her and the cash box. I won't do it—not with her, for certain; not with the cash box if I can help it. I don't believe a word about a Hand of Glory. I'm curious to know how she'll get out of it, now she's promised to show it me.'

He started, and swore.

'Gorr!' he said; 'it's only a rat behind the

wainscot; I thought it was the hand creeping after me. I suppose I must go. For certain, Mrs. Veale is a bad un. But; what is that? The shadow of my own hand on the wall, naught else.'

He threw over him a cloak he wore in wet weather, and hid the lantern under it.

'For sure,' he said, 'folks would think it queer if they saw me going out such a summer night as this with a lantern; but I won't go to Wellon's Cairn without, that is certain.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Veale; 'so you have come at last!'

'Yes, I have come. Where is the master? I've not seen him about.'

'He never said nothing to no one, and went off to Holsworthy to-day.'

'When will he be back?'

'Not to-morrow; there's a fair there; the day after, perhaps.'

A heavy black cloud hung in the sky, stretching apparently above Broadbury. Be-

low it the silvery light flowed from behind the horizon. To the east, although it was night, the range of Dartmoor was visible, bathed in the soft reflection from the north-western sky. The tumulus upon which Wellon had been executed was not far out on the heath. Mrs. Veale led the way with firm tread; Charles followed with growing reluctance. A great white owl whisked by. The glowworms were shining mysteriously under tufts of grass. As they pushed through the heather they disturbed large moths. A rabbit dashed past.

'Hush!' whispered Charles. 'I'm sure I heard a horn.'

'Ah!' answered Mrs. Veale, 'Squire Arscott rides the downs at night, they say, and has this hundred years.'

'I don't care to go any further,' said the young man.

'You shall come on. I am going to show you the Hand of Glory.'

He was powerless to resist. As his father

had fallen under the authority of Honor, so the strong over-mastering will of this woman domineered Charles, and made him do what she would. He felt his subjection, his powerlessness. He saw the precipice to which she was leading him, and knew that he could not escape.

'I wish I had never come to Langford,' he muttered to himself. 'It's Honor's doing. If I go wrong, she is to blame. She sent me here, and all for ninepence.' Then, stepping forward beside the housekeeper, 'I say, Mrs. Veale, how do you manage to stow anything away in a mound?'

'Easy, if the mound be not solid,' she replied. 'There is a sort of stone coffin in the middle, made of pieces of granite set on end, and others laid on top. When the treasure-seekers dug into the hill, they came as far as one of the stones, and they stove it in, but found nothing, or, if they found aught, they

carried it away. Then, I reckon, they put the stone back, or the earth fell down and covered all up, and the heather bushes grew over it all. But I looked one day about there for a place where I could hide things. I thought as the master had his secret place, I'd have mine too; and I knew no place could be safer than where old Wellon hung, as folk don't like to come too near it—leastways in the dark. Well, then, I found a little hole, as might have been made by a rabbit, and I cleared it out; and there I found the gap and the stone coffin. I crept in, it were not over big, but wi' a light I could see about. I thought at first I'd come on Wellon's bones, but no bones were there, nothing at all but a rabbit nest, and some white snail shells. After that I made up the entrance again, just as it was, and no one would know it was there. But I can find it; there is a bunch of heath by it, and some rushes, and how rushes came to grow there beats me.'

'So you keep Wellon's hand in there, do you?'

'Yes, I do.'

'How did you manage to get it?'

'I will not tell you.'

'I do not believe you have it; I don't believe but what you told me a parcel of lies about the Hand of Glory. I've been to Afghanistan, and Cabul, and the Bombay Presidency, and never heard of such a thing. It is not in reason. If a dead hand can move, why has not my finger that was cut off in battle come back to me?'

'Shall I send the Hand after it?'

The suggestion made Charles uneasy. He looked about him, as afraid to see the black hand running on the grass, leaping the tufts of furze, carrying his dead finger, to drop it at his feet.

'What are you muttering?' asked he, sharply.

'I'm only repeating, Hand of Glory!

Hand of Light! Fetch, fetch! Run and bring——'

'I'll strike you down if you go on with your devilry, you hag,' said Charles, angrily.

'We are at the place.'

They entered the cutting made by the treasure-seekers, the gap in which Honor had often sat in the sun, unconscious of the stone kistvaen hidden behind her, indifferent to the terrors of the haunted hill, whilst the sun blazed on it.

'The night is much darker than it was,' said Charles uneasily, as he looked about him.

It was as he said. The black mass of cloud had spread and covered the sky, cutting off the light except from the horizon.

'I don't like the looks of the cloud,' said Charles. 'There will be rain before long, and there's thunder aloft for certain.'

'What is that to you? Are you afraid of a shower? You have your cloak. Bring out the lantern. It matters not who sees the light

now. If anyone does see it, he'll say it's a corpse-candle on its travels.'

'What is a corpse-candle?'

'Don't you know?' She gave a short, dry laugh. 'It's a light that travels by night along a road, and comes to the door of the house out of which a corpse will be brought in a day or two.'

'Does no one carry the candle?'

'It travels by itself.' Then she said, 'Give me the light.'

'I will not let it out of my hand,' answered Charles, looking about him timorously. 'I don't think anyone will see the light, down in this hole.'

'Hold the lantern where I show you—there.'

He did as required. It gave a poor, sickly light, but sufficient to show where the woman wanted to work. She began to scratch away the earth with her hands, and Charles, watching her, thought she worked as a rabbit or

hare might with its front paws. Presently she said:

'There is the hole, look in.'

He saw a dark opening, but had no desire to peer into it. Indeed, he drew back.

'How can I see, if you take away the lantern?' asked Mrs. Veale. 'Put your arm in and you will find the hand.'

He drew still further away. 'I will not. I have seen enough. I know of this hiding-place. That suffices. I will go home.'

The horror came over him lest she should force him to put his hand into the stone coffin, and that there, in the blackness and mystery of the interior, the dead hand of the murderer would make a leap and clasp his.

'I have had enough of this,' he said, and a shiver ran through him, 'I will go home. Curse me! I'm not going to be mixed up with all this devilry and witchery if I can help it.'

'Perhaps the hand is gone,' said Mrs. Veale.

'Oh! I hope so.'

'I sent it after your finger.'

'Indeed, may it be long on its travels.' He was reassured. It was not pleasant to think of so close proximity to the murderer's embalmed, still active hand. He suspected that Mrs. Veale was attempting to wriggle out of her undertaking. 'Indeed—I thought I was to see the hand, and now the hand is not here.'

'I cannot say. Anyhow, the money is here.'

'What money?'

'That for which you asked.'

'I asked for none.'

'You desired a hundred pounds for the purpose of getting back Coombe Park. Put in your hand and take it.'

'I will not.'

His courage was returning, as he thought he saw evasion of her promise in the woman.

'For the matter of that, if this Hand of

Glory can fetch money, it might as well fetch more than that.'

'How much?'

'A hundred is not over much. Two hundred—a thousand.'

'Say a thousand.'

'So I do.'

'Put in your hand. It is there.'

'Hark!'

'Put in your hand.'

'I will not.'

'Then you fool! you coward! I must take it for you!' she hissed in her husky voice. She stooped, and thrust both her hands and arms deep into the kistvaen.

'Hush!' whispered Charles, as he laid his hand on her shoulder, and covered the light with a flap of his mantle. She remained still for a minute with her arms buried in the grave. There was certainly a sound, a tramp of many feet, and the fall of horses' hoofs, heard, then not heard, as they went over road or turf.

'There,' whispered Mrs. Veale, and drew a box from the hole and placed it on Charles's lap. As she did so, the mantleflap fell from the lantern, and the light shone over the box. Charles at once recognised Taverner Langford's cash box, with the letter padlock.

'Ebal,' whispered Mrs. Veale. 'A thousand pounds are yours.'

At that instant, loud and startling, close to the cairn sounded the blast of a horn, instantly responded to by the baying and yelping of dogs, by shouts, and screams, and cheers, and a tramp of rushing feet, and a crack of whips.

The suddenness of the uproar, its unexpectedness, its weirdness, coming on Charles's overwrought nerves, at the same moment that he saw himself unwillingly involved in a robbery, completely overcame him; he uttered a cry of horror, sprang to his feet, upset the money box, and leaped out of the cutting, swinging the lantern, with his wide mantle flapping about him. His foot tripped and he fell; he

picked himself up and bounded into the road against a horse with rider, who was in the act of blowing a horn.

Charles was too frightened and bewildered to remember anything about the hare hunt. He did not know where he was, what he was doing, against whom he had flung himself. The horse plunged, bounded aside, and cast his rider from his back. Charles stood with one hand to his head looking vacantly at the road and the prostrate figure in it. In another moment Mrs. Veale was at his elbow. 'What have you done?' she gasped. 'You fool! what have you done?'

Charles had sufficiently recovered himself to understand what had taken place.

'It is the hare hunt,' he said. 'Do you hear them? The dogs! This is—my God! it is Larry Nanspian. He is dead. I said I would break his neck, and I have done it. But I did not mean it. I did not intend to frighten the horse. I—I'—and he burst into tears.

'You are a fool,' said Mrs. Veale angrily. 'What do you mean staying here?' She took the horn from the prostrate Larry and blew it. 'Don't let them turn and find you here by his dead body. If you will not go, I must, though I had no hand in killing him.' She snatched the lantern from his hand and extinguished it. 'That ever I had to do with such an one as you! Be off, as you value your neck; do not stay. Be off! If you threatened Larry and have fulfilled your threat, who will believe that this was accident?'

Charles, who had been overcome by weakness for a moment, was nerved again by fear.

'Take his head,' said Mrs. Veale, 'lay him on the turf, among the dark gorse, where he mayn't be seen all at once, and that will give you more time to get off.'

'I cannot take his head,' said Charles, trembling.

'Then take his heels. Do as I bid,' ordered the housekeeper. She bent and raised Larry.

'Sure enough,' she said, 'his neck is broken. He'll never speak another word.'

Charles let go his hold of the feet. 'I will not touch him,' he said. 'I will not stay. I wish I'd never come to Langford. It was all Honor's fault forcing me. I must go.'

'Yes, go,' said Mrs. Veale, 'and go along Broadbury, where you will meet no man, and no footmarks will be left by which you may be traced.' Mrs. Veale, unassisted, dragged the senseless body out of the rough road over the turf.

'Is he dead? is he really dead?' asked Charles.

'Go!' said Mrs. Veale, 'or I shall have the chance of your hand to make into a better Hand of Glory than that of Wellon.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

BITTER MEDICINE.

The hare and hounds ran some distance before they perceived that they were not pursued by the huntsman and that the horn had ceased to cheer them on. Then little Piper, the cattle-jobber, clothed in the black ox-hide, stopped panting, turned, and said, 'Where be the hunter to? I don't hear his horse nor his horn.' The dogs halted. They were boys and young men with blackened faces. Piper's face was also covered with soot. His appearance was diabolical, with the long ears on his head, his white eyes peering about from under them, a bladder under his chin, and the black hide enveloping him. According to the

traditional usage on such occasions, the hunt ends with the stag or hare, one or the other, being fagged out, and thrown at the door of the house whose inmates' conduct has occasioned the stag or hare hunt. Then the hunter stands astride over the animal, if a stag, and with a knife slits the bladder that is distended with bullock's blood, and which is thus poured out before the offender's door. If, however, the hunt be that of a hare the pretence is—or was —made of knocking it on the head. It may seem incredible to our readers that such savage proceedings should still survive in our midst, yet it is so, and they will not be readily abolished.[1]

Not suspecting anything, the hare and the pack turned and ran back along the road they

[1] The author once tore down with his own hands the following bill affixed to a wall at four cross roads :—

'NOTICE!—ON THURSDAY NIGHT THE RED HUNTER'S PACK OF STAG HOUNDS WILL MEET AT . . . INN, AND WILL RUN TO GROUND A FAMOUS STAG. GENTLEMEN ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND.'

The police were communicated with, but were unable to interfere as no breach of the peace was committed.

had traversed, yelping, shouting, hooting, blowing through their half-closed hands, leaping, some lads riding on the backs of others, one in a white female ragged gown running about and before the hare, flapping the arms and hooting like an owl.

Would Taverner Langford come forth, worked to fury by the insult? Several were armed with sticks in the event of an affray with him and his men. Would he hide behind a hedge and fire at them out of his trumpet-mouthed blunderbuss that hung over the kitchen mantelpiece in Langford? If he did that, they had legs and could run beyond range. They did not know that he was away at Holsworthy. The road to that town lay over the back of Broadbury and passed not another house in the parish.

The wild chase swept over the moor, past Wellon's Cairn, past Langford, then turned and went back again.

'I'll tell you what it be,' said Piper, halting

and confronting his pursuers. 'Larry Nanspian have thought better of it, and gone home. T'es his uncle, you know, we'm making game of, and p'raps he's 'shamed to go on in it.'

'He should have thought of that before,' said one of the dogs. 'Us ain't a going to have our hunt spoiled for the lack of a hunter.'

'Why didn't he say so in proper time?' argued a second.

'Heigh! there's his horse!' shouted a third, and ran over the moor towards the piebald, which, having recovered from its alarm, was quietly browsing on the sweet, fine moor grass.

'Sure eneaf it be,' said Piper; 'then Larry can't be far off.'

Another shout.

'He's been thrown. He is lying here by the roadside.'

Then there was a rush of the pack to the spot indicated, and in a moment the insensible

lad was in the arms of Piper, surrounded by an eager throng.

'Get along, you fellows,' shouted the hare, 'you'll give him no breathing room.'

'Ah! and where'll he think himself, I wonder, when he opens his eyes and sees he is in the hands of one with black face and long ears, and tail and hairy body? I reckon he won't suppose he's in Abraham's bosom.'

'What'll he take you for either, in your black faces?' retorted Piper. 'Not angels of light, sure-ly.' Then old Crout hobbled up. He had followed far in the rear, as best he could with his lame leg and stick.

'What be the matter, now?' he asked. 'What, Larry Nanspian throwed? Some o' you lads run for a gate. Us mun' carry 'n home on that. There may be bones abroke, mussy knows.'

'I reckon we can't take 'n into Langford,' suggested Sam Voaden.

'Likely, eh?' sneered Piper. 'You Sam,

get a gate for the lad. He must be carried home at once, and send for a doctor.'

He was obeyed; and in a few minutes a procession was formed, conveying Larry from the moor.

'He groaned as we lifted 'n,' said Sam Voaden.

'So he's got life in him yet.'

'His hand ain't cold, what I may call dead cold,' said another.

'You go for'ard, Piper,' said Tom Crout, 'that he mayn't see you and be frightened if he do open his eyes.'

Then the cattle-jobber walked first, holding the long cow's tail over his arm, lest those who followed should tread on it and be tripped up. Sam Voaden and three other young men raised the gate on their shoulders, and walked easily under it. Behind came the hounds, careful not to present their blackened faces to the opening eyes of their unconscious friend; and, lastly, Tom Crout mounted on the piebald.

One of the boys had found the horn, and unable to resist the temptation to try his breath on it, blew a faint blast.

'Shut up, will you?' shouted Piper, turning. 'Who is that braying? You'll be making Larry fancy he hears the last trump, and he'll jump off the gate and hurt himself again.'

Larry Nanspian had not broken his neck nor fractured his skull. He was much bruised, strained, and his right arm and collar-bone were broken. His insensibility proceeded from concussion of the brain; but even this was not serious, for he gradually recovered his consciousness as he was being carried homewards. Too dazed at first to know where he was, what had happened, and how he came to be out and lying on a gate, he did not speak or stir. Indeed, he felt unwilling to make an effort, a sense of exhaustion overmastered him, and every movement caused him pain. He lay with his face to the night sky, watching the dark cloud, listening to the voices of his

bearers, and picking with the fingers of his left hand at a mossy gate bar under him. At first he did not hear what words were passing about him, he was aware only of voices speaking: the first connected sentence he was able to follow was this:—

'Twould be a bad job if Larry were killed.'

'Bad job for him, yes,' was the reply.

'What do y' mean by that?' asked Sam Voaden. He recognised Sam's voice at once, and he felt the movement of Sam's shoulder tilting the fore end of the gate as he turned his head to ask the question.

'O, I mean naught but what everyone says. A bad job for any chap to die; but I don't reckon the loss would be great to Chimsworthy. Some chance, then, of the farm going to proper hands. Larry ain't much, and never will be, but for larks and big talk. I say that Chimsworthy is a disgrace to the parish; and what is more there is sure to be a smash there unless

there comes an alteration. Alteration there would never be under Larry.'

'I've heard tell that the old man has borrowed a sight of money from Taverner Langford, and now he's bound to pay it off, and can't do it.'

'Not like to, the way he's gone on; sowing brag brings brambles.'

'You see,' said Voaden, 'they always reckoned on getting Langford, some day, when the old fellow died.'

'And what a mighty big fool Larry is to aggravate his uncle. Instead of keeping good terms with the old gentleman he goes out o' his road to offend him.'

'I say it's regular un-decent his being out to-night hunting the hare before his own uncle's door.'

'I say so, too. It weren't my place to say naught, but I thought it, and so did every proper chap.'

'It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest.'

'Does his father know what's he's been after?'

'No, of course not; old Nanspian would ha' taken a stick to his back, if he'd heard he was in for such things.'

'I know that however bad an uncle might use me, I'd never have nothing to do with a hare hunt that concerned him—no, nor an aunt neither.'

'Larry was always a sort of a giddy chap.'

'He's a bit o' a fool, or he wouldn't have come into this.'

'Maybe this will shake what little sense he has out of his head.'

'I'll tell y' what. If Larry had been in the army—he'd have turned out as great a blackguard as Charles Luxmore.'

'The girls have spoiled Larry, they make so much of him.'

'Make much of him! They like to make sport of him, but there's not one of them cares a farthing for him, not if they've any sense.

They know fast enough what Chimsworthy and idleness are coming too. Why, there was Kate Luxmore. Everyone thought she and Larry were keeping company and would make a pair; but this evening, you saw, directly she had a chance of Sam, she shook him off, and quite right too.'

'Never mind me and Kate,' said Sam, turning his head again.

'But us do mind, and us think as Kate be a sensible maiden, and us thought her a fool before to take up wi' Larry Nanspian.'

This conversation was not pleasant for the young man laid on the gate to hear, and it took from him the desire to speak and allow his bearers to know he was awake, and had heard their criticism on his character and conduct. The judgment passed on him was not altogether just, but there was sufficient justice in it to humble him. Yes, he had acted most improperly in allowing himself to be drawn into taking part in the hare hunt. No—he was not,

he could never have become such a blackguard as Charles Luxmore.

'Halt!' commanded Piper, and the convoy stood still.

'We can't go like this to Chimsworthy,' said the little cattle-jobber; 'it'll give the old man another stroke. Let us stop at the Luxmores' cottage, and wash our faces, and put off these things, and send on word that we're coming; the old fellow mustn't be dropt down on wi' bad news too sudden.'

'Right! Honor shall be sent on to break the news.'

Honor! Larry felt the blood mount to his brow. She had herself dissuaded him from having anything to do with this wretched affair which had ended so disastrously to himself, and when Kate advised him to keep away from it because Honor disapproved, he had sent her an insolent defiance. Now he was to be laid before her door, bruised and broken, because he had disobeyed her warning. He tried to lift

himself to protest—but sank back. No—he thought—it serves me right.

The party descended the rough lane from Broadbury, and had to move more slowly and with greater precaution. The bearers had to look to their steps and talk less. Larry's thoughts turned to Honor. Now he had found out how true were her words. What she had said to him gently, was said now roughly, woundingly. She had but spoken to him the wholesome truth which was patent to everyone but himself, but she had spoken it so as to inflict no pain. She had tried to humble him, but with so pitiful a hand, that he could have kissed the hand, and asked it to continue its work. But he had not taken her advice, he had not learned her lesson, and he was now called to suffer the consequences. Those nights spent beside Honor under the clear night sky—how happy they had been! How her influence had fallen over him like dew, and he had felt that it was well with him to his heart's core.

How utterly different she was from the other girls of Bratton. They flattered him. She rebuked him. They pressed their attentions on him. She shrank from his notice. He could recall all she had said. Her words stood out in his recollection like the stars in the night heavens—but he had not directed his course by them.

Now, as the young men carried him down the lane, he knew every tree he passed, and that he was nearing Honor, step by step. He desired to see her, yet feared her reproachful eye.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER SWEETNESS.

Oliver Luxmore had returned home before Kate came from the dance, and had eaten his supper, and gone to bed. Her father had been a cause of distress to Honor of late. He said, indeed, no more about Taverner's suit, but he could not forget it, and he was continually grumbling over the difficulties of his position, his poverty, the hardships of his having to be a carrier, when he ought to be a gentleman, and might be a squire if certain persons would put out a little finger to help him to his rights.

His careless good humour had given place to peevish discontent. By nature he was kind and considerate, but his disappointment had, at least temporarily, embittered his mood. He

threw out oblique reproaches which hurt Honor, for she felt that they were aimed at her. He complained that times were altered, children were wthout filial affection, they begrudged their parents the repose that was their due in the evening of their days. He was getting on in years, and was forced to slave for the support of a family, when his family—at least the elder of them—ought to be maintaining him. He wished that the Thrustle were as deep as the Tamar, and he would throw himself in and so end his sorrows. His children—his ungrateful children—must not be surprised if some day he did not return. There was no saying, on occasions, when a waterspout broke, the Thrustle was so full of water that a man might drown himself in it.

In vain did Honor attempt to turn his thoughts into pleasanter channels. He found a morbid pleasure in being absorbed in the contemplation of his sores. He became churlish towards Honor and refused to be cheered. She

had fine speeches on her tongue, but he was a man who preferred deeds to words. A girl of words and not of deeds was like a garden full of weeds. When the weeds began to grow, like the heavens thick with snow, when the snow began to fall—and so on—and so on—he had forgotten the rest of the jingle.

Now for the first time, dimly, was Honor conscious of a moral resemblance between her father and Charles. What Charles had become, her father might become. The elements of character were in germ in him that had developed in the son. As likenesses in a family come out at unexpected moments, that had never before been noticed, so was it with the psychical features of these two. Honor saw Charles in her father, and the sight distressed her.

Oliver Luxmore did not venture to say out openly what he desired, but his hints, his insinuations, his grumblings, were significant; they pierced as barbed steel, they bruised as blows. Till recently, Oliver had recognised

his daughter's moral superiority, and had submitted. Now his eye was jaundiced. He thought her steadfastness of purpose to be doggedness, her resistance to his wishes to be the result of self-will, and his respect for her faded.

Although Honor made no complaint, no defence, she suffered acutely. She had surrendered Larry because her duty tied her to the home that needed her. Was it necessary for her to make a further sacrifice—a supreme sacrifice for the sake of her father? She had no faith in the verbal promises of Taverner Langford, to stand by and assist her brothers and sisters, but it was in her power to exact from him a written undertaking which he would be unable to shake off. Suppose she were to marry Langford—what then? Then—the dark cloud would lift and roll away. There would be no more struggle to make both ends meet, no more patching and darning of old clothes, no more limiting of the amount

of bread dealt out to each child. Her father's temper would mend. He would recover his kindly humour, and play with the little ones, and joke with the neighbours, and be affectionate towards her. There would be no more need for him to travel with a waggon in all weathers to market, but he would spend his last years in comfort, cared for by his children, instead of exhausting himself for them.

However bright such a prospect might appear, Honor could not reconcile herself to it. Her feminine instincts revolted against the price she must pay to obtain it.

That evening Oliver Luxmore ate his supper in sulky silence, and went to bed without wishing Honor a good night. When Kate arrived, she found her sister in tears.

'Honor!' exclaimed the eager, lively girl, 'what is the matter? You have been crying —because you could not go to the dance.'

'No, dear Kate, not at all.'

'Honor! what is the meaning of this?

Marianne Spry tells me she saw the silk kerchief you gave me before to-day.'

'Well, why not?'

'But, Honor, I do not understand. Mrs. Spry says that Larry bought it—bought it at Tavistock after he had killed the dog that worried our lambs—after he had got the guinea, and she believes he bought it with that money.'

'Well, Kate!' Honor stooped over her needlework.

'Well, Honor!'—Kate paused and looked hard at her. 'How is it that Larry bought it, and you had it in your chest? That is what I want to know.'

'Larry gave it me.'

'Oh—ho! He gave it you!'

'Yes, I sat up with him when he was watching for the lamb-killer; he is grateful for that trifling trouble I took.'

'But, Honor! Marianne Spry said that she and others chaffed Larry in the van about the

kerchief he had bought for me—and it was *not* for me.'

Honor said nothing; she worked very diligently with her fingers by the poor light of the tallow candle on the table. Kate stooped to get sight of her face, and saw that her cheek was red.

'Honor, dear! The kerchief was not for me. Why did you make me wear it?'

'Because, Kate—because you are the right person to wear his present.'

'I—why I?' asked Kate impetuously.

Honor looked up, looked steadfastly into her sister's eyes.

'Because Larry loves you, and you love him.'

'I can answer for myself that I do not,' said Kate vehemently. 'And I don't fancy he is much in love with me. No, Honor, he was in a queer mood this evening, and what made him queer was that you were not in the barn, and had decked me out in the kerchief he gave

you to wear. I could not make it out at the time, but now I see it all.' Then Kate laughed gaily. 'I don't suppose you care very much for him, he's a Merry Andrew and a scatter-brain, but I do believe he has a liking for you, Honor, and I believe there is no one in the world could make a fine good man of Larry but you.' Then the impulsive girl threw her arms round her sister. 'There!' she exclaimed, 'I'm glad you don't care for Larry, because he is not worthy of you—no, there's not a lad that is—except, maybe Samuel Voaden, and him I won't spare even to you.'

'Oh, Kate!'

So the sisters sat on, and the generous, warm-hearted Kate told all her secret to her sister.

When girls talk of the affairs of the heart, time flies with them. Their father and brothers and sisters were asleep, and they sat on late. Kate was happy to confide in her sister.

All at once Kate started, and held her finger to her ear.

'I hear something. O Honor, what is it? I hope these hare-hunters be not coming this way.'

She had not told Honor Larry's message.

'I hear feet,' answered the elder. 'Do not go to the door, Kate. It is very late.'

The tramp of feet ceased, the two girls with beating hearts heard steps ascend to their door, then a rap at it. Honor went at once to open. Kate hung back. She suspected the hare-hunters, but was afraid of the black faces, and she could not understand the halt and summons.

'Don't y' be frightened, Honor,' said a voice through the door, 'us want y' out here a bit, if you don't mind.' Honor unbolted, and the blackfaced, white-eyed, long-eared, skin-clothed Piper stood before her, holding the black cow tail in his hand.

'Don't y' be scared. I'm only the hare. I won't touch a hair of your head.'

'What do you want, Mr. Piper?' asked Honor without trepidation.

'Well, it is this. There's been an accident, and Master Larry Nanspian hev fallen on his head off his horse and hurted himself bad.'

Honor began to tremble, and caught the door with one hand and the door-post with the other.

'Now do y' take it easy. He ain't dead, only hurt. Us don't want to go right on end carrying him into Chimsworthy, all of us dressed as we are. First place, it might frighten Master Nanspian, second place, he mightn't like the larks Larry has been on. So us thought if you would let us clean our faces, and take off our skins and other things, and cut the green coat off the back of Larry, here; and then, you'd be so good as run on to Chimsworthy and prepare the old gentleman, you'd be—well, you'd be yourself—I couldn't put it better.'

Honor had recovered her composure.

'I will do what you wish,' she said, and her voice was firm, though low.

'You see,' Piper went on. 'It's a bit

ockerd like ; I reckon the old man wouldn't be satisfied that Larry were mixed up in a hare-hunt that made game of Taverner Langford, his own wife's brother ; and I don't say that Larry acted right in being in it. Howsomever, he has been, and is now the worse for it. Will you please to bring the candle and let us see how bad he be.'

Honor took the tin candlestick with the tallow dip, and descended the steps, holding it.

The four bearers set the gate upon the ground, and Honor held the candle aloft that the light might fall on Larry. But a soft wind was blowing, and it drove the flame on one side, making the long wick glow and then carrying it away in sparks.

'Mr. Piper, go into the cottage and ask my sister Kate to give you my scissors. I will remove the coat. Go all of you, either to the well a few steps down the lane, or into our kitchen, and wait. Kate will give you towel and soap. Leave me with Larry. I must deal

very gently with him, and I had rather you were none of you by.'

'You're right,' said Piper. 'Us had better have white faces and get clear of horses and other gear before he sees us.'

'We must be quick,' said Sam Voaden. 'Larry must be got home as fast as may be.'

Then they ran, some to the well in the bank, some—Sam, of course—into the cottage, and left Honor for a moment or two beside the prostrate man, kneeling, holding the guttering candle with one hand, and screening the flame from the wind with the other.

Then Larry opened his eyes, and looked long and earnestly into her face. He said nothing. He did not stir a finger; but his eyes spoke.

'Larry!' she breathed. Her heart spoke in her voice, 'Larry, are you much hurt?'

He slightly moved his head.

'Much, Larry? where?'

'In my pride, Honor,' he answered.

She looked at him with surprise: at first hardly comprehending his meaning.

Then Kate came down the steps with the scissors.

'O Honor! How dreadful! I told him not to go! I told him you disapproved! And now he is punished. O Honor! is he badly injured? He is not killed?'

'No, Kate, he is not killed. How far hurt I cannot tell. Larry! you must let me move you. I may hurt you a little——'

'You cannot hurt me,' he said. 'I have hurt myself.'

'O Honor!' exclaimed Kate. 'If he can speak he is not so bad. Shall I help?'

'No, Kate,' answered Honor, 'go back to the cottage and give the young men what they want to clean their faces; those at the well also. I can manage Larry by myself.'

She stooped over him.

'Larry! you must let me raise you a little bit. Tell me truly, are any bones broken?'

'I do not know, Honor. I feel as if I could not move. I am full of pain, full in all my limbs, but most full in my heart.'

She began to cut up the seams of the sleeves.

'I cannot move my right arm,' he said. 'I suppose there is some breakage there.'

'Yes,' she said gravely, 'I can feel a bone is broken.'

'If that be all it does not matter,' he said more cheerfully, 'but I want to say to you, Honor, something whilst no one is by.'

'What is it?'

'I have done very wrong in many ways. I have been a fool, and I shall never be anything else unless you——'

'Never mind that now,' she hastily interrupted him. 'We must think only at present of your aching joints and broken bones.'

Then Oliver Luxmore's voice was heard calling, and asking what was the matter? Who were in the house? He had been roused from his sleep and was alarmed. Kate ran up the

stairs to pacify him, and when he knew the circumstances he hastily dressed.

An altercation broke out at the well. There was not room for all to get at the water. One came running up with streaming face to Honor, 'Am I clean?' he asked. 'How is Larry? Not so bad hurt after all, is he?' Then he went up the steps into the cottage to consult his fellows as to the condition of his face, and to wipe it.

Honor removed the coat in pieces.

'Thank you,' said Larry. 'The candle is out?'

'Yes, the wind has made it out (extinguished it).'

'My left hand is sound. Come on that side.'

She did as he asked.

'And this,' he said, 'is the side where my heart is. Honor, I'm very sorry I did not follow your advice. I am sorry now for many things. I want you to forgive me.'

'I have nothing to forgive.'

'Lean over me. I want to whisper. I don't want the fellows to hear.'

She stooped with her face near his. Then he raised his uninjured arm, put it round her neck, and drew her cheek to his lips, and kissed her. 'Honor! dear Honor! I love no one! no one in the world but you! And I love you more than words can say.'

Did she kiss him? She did not know herself. A light, then a darkness, were before her eyes. What time passed then? A second or a century? She did not know. A sudden widening of the world to infinity, a loss of all limitations—time, space—an unconsciousness of distinction, joy, pain, day, night, a loss of identity—was it she herself, or another?

Then a wakening as from a trance, with tingling veins, and dazed eyes, and whirling brain, and fluttering heart, and voice uncontrolled, as from the cottage door, down the steps, and from the well, up the lane came simultaneously the rabble of boys and men.

'Well, how is he?' 'Have you got the coat off?' 'Can he speak?' 'Any bones broke?'

Honor could not answer the questions; she heard them, but had no voice wherewith to speak.

'Raise the gate again,' said Piper. 'Sam, are you ready? Why are you behind? We must get on.'

'Honor,' said Larry in a low voice, 'walk by the side of me. Hold my hand.'

'He is better,' said one of the young men; 'he can speak. He knows Honor.'

'Yes, he is better,' she said, 'but he has his right arm broken, and he is much shaken and bruised. Let me walk beside him, I can stay the gate and ease him as you carry him over the ruts and stones.' So she walked at his side with her hand in his. In a few minutes the party had arrived at the granite gates of Chimsworthy.

'Stay here,' ordered Piper. 'Now, Honor

Luxmore, will you go on up the avenue and tell the old gentleman? Us'll come after with Master Larry in ten minutes.'

'I will go,' said Honor, disengaging her hand.

'How are you now?' asked Piper, coming up to the young man.

'Better,' he said, 'better than ever before.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FIRST STEP.

For the next two days and nights Larry was in great pain. His arm and collar-bone had been set, but strains are more painful than breakages, and the young fellow in his fall had managed to bruise and sprain his muscles as well as fracture his bones. He could not sleep; he could not move in bed; every turn, even the slightest, caused him agony. The doctor enjoined perfect rest. Through the two long sleepless nights his mind was active, and the train of thought that had begun as he was being carried from Broadbury continued to move in his brain. What different nights were these to those spent by him on the bench with Honor! He con-

sidered what she had said to him, and he knew that what she had said was right. How careless of his best interests he had been! How regardless of his duties! How neglectful of his proper self-respect! Of course she was right. His father never had properly managed the farm, and since his stroke he had paid it less attention than before. He, the son and heir, ought to have devoted himself to the work of the farm, and made that his main object, not to amuse himself.

His father came up to his room several times a day to enquire how he was.

'There's Physick coming here,' said the old man, 'and I want you to use your hand when he comes.'

'I have only my left.'

'Well, the left must do. If you can't sign your name, you can make a cross and that will suffice.'

'What do you want me to sign, father?'

'The mortgage. Physick will find the

money, and then we shall pay off Taverner Langford, and have done.'

Larry sighed. He remembered what Honor had said. He was helping to burden, not to relieve, the property.

'Can't it be helped, father? I'd rather not, if the money could be raised any other way.'

'But that is impossible without a sale.'

'Why did Uncle Taverner lend the money?'

'We were behind in a score of things.'

'Is it all gone, father?'

'Gone! of course it is. Now I'm wanting more, and I must raise double what Taverner lends me, half to pay him off, and half to meet present demands.'

'How is this?'

'Bad times. Things will come round some day.'

'How long have they been bad?'

'Ever since your mother died. That was

a bad day for us.' The old man sat rubbing his chin. 'The next bad day was when I quarrelled with Taverner, or rather, when Taverner quarrelled with me. 'Tis a pity. I made up his orchard with my new grafts; and a more beautiful lot of apple-trees are not to be seen—and he for to cut them. Shameful.'

'What was the quarrel about, father?'

'I've told you afore. A red spider. Taverner tried to sloke (draw) her away, when she was running straight as a line into my pocket. But I reckon he can't keep you for ever out of Langford. He may live for ten or twelve years out of wicked spite, but he is not immortal, and Langford will come to you in the end. Then you can clear off the mortgages. —I reckon I shall be gone then.'

'Don't say that, father.'

'I know I shall. When Taverner sloked that spider away he carried off my health, and I were took with the stroke immediately. I've not been myself since.' He continued rubbing

his chin. 'And now comes this mortgage, and you laid up in bed as you never was before. It all comes o' sloking away the spider.'

'Father,' said Larry earnestly, but timorously: 'I wish you would let me bring another here.'

'Another what?'

'Red Spider.'

'What do you mean?'

'Honor Luxmore.'

The old man looked puzzled, then gradually an idea of his son's meaning crept into his head.

'I thought,' said he slowly, 'I thought it was t'other maid.'

'No, dear father, I love Honor. Let me bring her here, let her be my wife, and I'm sure she will bring luck to this house.'

Hillary senior continued rubbing his chin. 'Her mayn't have money,' he mused, 'but her's good up and down the backbone; as a money-spinner is all redness and naught else,

so is Honor all goodness and not a speck of black in her.'

'It is so indeed, father.'

'I'm better pleased than if it were Kate.'

'I never really thought of Kate.'

'Well, you was sly about it then. All folks said that Kate had stolen your fancy. Well now, Honor mayn't be a money-bringer, I reckon she's got nothing—Oliver be poor as rushy land—but she may spin it. There's no saying.'

'Say yes, father.'

'Her's a red spider that Taverner won't try to sloke away,' chuckled old Nanspian. Then he continued musing. He was an altered man of late, not ready with his thoughts, quick of motion, lively of tongue as before. He took time to come to a decision, and drifted in his ideas from one matter to another. 'Things haven't gone quite right since Blandina died, they haven't—though I don't allow that to others. I've had five years of wool heamed (laid) up.

I said I'd not sell with wool so low, and it has been sorry down ever since, and now it's risen a penny and I tried to sell—the worm is in it and the staple is spoiled, and it won't fetch any price. Then there be the maidens. They've let the thunder get into the milk and turn it sour, and wasted the Lord knows how much butter, because they were lazy and wouldn't leave their beds in time at five o'clock, and make before the sun is hot. If you'd a good wife, her'd mend all that. And Honor! well, no one has other than a good word for her. I'm main pleased wi' your choice, Larry. Yes, I be.'

'Oh, father! Thank you! thank you!'

'It's not for me to go into the maidens' room and rake them out of bed at half-past three in the mornings. I put it to you, Larry. Folks would say it was ondecent. And if I don't, the butter ain't made, the thunder gets in the pans, and I lose many pounds. I reckon Honor Luxmore would do that. I've been

racking my brains as you rack cider, how to get over the difficulty, and it was all dark before me, but now I see daylight at last. Honor will rake the maids out o' their beds, and I needn't interfere. You'll be quick about it, won't you, Larry, before the blazing hot summer weather sets in, with thunder in the air, and spoils the milk.'

He passed his hand through his grey hair. 'I had a bell put up in their bedroom, and a wire brought along to mine, and a handle nigh my bed, that I might ring them up in the mornings early. It cost me nigh on thirty shillings did that bell. The hanger had to come all the way from Tavistock, and it took him two days to put up, and there were a lot of cranks to it. Well, it was just so much money thrown away. What do y' think the maidens contrived? Why, they stuffed an old worsted stocking into the bell and tied it round the clapper; I might pull the rope as if I were pealing a triple bob major, and not a sound

came out of the bell, because of the stocking. Well, I wouldn't go into the maidens' room and see what was the matter, and so I sent to Tavistock for the bell-hanger out again, and he charged me three shillings for himself, and half-a-crown for his man, and ten shillings for the hire of a trap, and all he did was to remove the stocking. Next night the maidens tied up the clapper with the fellow stocking. If Honor were here she'd put all that to rights, wouldn't she?'

'I'm sure of it, father.'

'You be sharp and get well,' continued the old man, 'then we'll have it all over, and save pounds of butter.' He stood up. 'I mustn't shake hands wi' you, Larry, but I'm main pleased. Honor's good through and through as a money-spinner is scarlet.'

Larry was fain to smile, in spite of his pain. This was like his father. The old man went on vehemently, hotly for some new fancy, and in a few weeks tired of it, and did nothing more about it.

Next day Physick the lawyer came, and brought the mortgage and the money. The signatures were appended, a cross for Larry, and the money received.

'Now,' said the old man, 'I'd like you, Mr. Physick, to go over to Langford and pay the sum I owe to my brother-in-law. I can't go myself. He's spoken that insolent to me, and that too before the whole of Coryndon's Charity, that I can never set foot over his drexil (threshold) again. So I'd wish you to go for me, and bring me my note of hand back all square.'

'I will go as well,' said Larry, who was up, able to walk about, but without his jacket, because of his bandaged bones and arm strapped back.

'You!' exclaimed his father. 'Why should you go?'

'I wish it,' answered the lad. 'I'll tell you the reason after.'

'You'd better not go out yet.'

'Why not? Mr. Physick will drive me

there and back in his gig. I shall not be shaken. The gig has springs.'

'I reckon there's a certain cottage the rogue will want to get out at on the way. Don't let him, Mr. Physick, or he won't be home for hours.'

Although the gig had springs Larry suffered in it, and was glad to descend with Mr. Physick at Langford.

Taverner Langford had returned home but an hour before; he had been to the fair at Holsworthy, and thence had gone into Bideford about a contract for young bullocks. He had just finished his dinner of bread and cheese, washed down with water, when Mrs. Veale opened the parlour door, and without a word showed in Mr. Physick and Larry.

Langford greeted the lawyer with a nod. 'Please to take a chair.' He stared at Hillary with surprise, and said nothing to him.

'We've come to pay you the loan you called in,' said Physick.

'Right,' answered Taverner, 'I was expecting the money, though why?—grapes of thorns and figs of thistles is against nature as well as Scripture.' Then he eyed his nephew furtively. He saw that he was looking pale and worn, that his arm was bandaged, and he was without a jacket. He saw that the lad moved stiffly when he walked. 'You may sit down,' he said gruffly. Larry took the back of an armchair with his left hand and drew it to him, then slowly let himself down into it. All his movements, and the twitching of the muscles in his face, showed he was in pain. His uncle watched him and saw this, but he asked no questions.

When the money had been counted, and the release handed over, and Physick had indulged in some desultory talk, and disparagement of water, which he saw that Taverner was drinking, he rose to leave. Langford was not in a conversationable mood, his dark brows were knit.

Then Larry stood up, and came towards the table, against which he stayed himself with his hand.

'I beg your pardon, Uncle Taverner,' he said in a voice somewhat tremulous, whilst colour came into and spotted his brow. 'I came here, though I thought you would not care to see me.'

'I don't mind when I see your back,' interrupted Langford surlily, 'your father insulted me grossly.'

'I have come, Uncle Taverner——'

'Ah! I suppose your father has sent you. He wants to patch up the quarrel; you may go back and tell him it is too late. I won't make it up. It is of no use. I have nothing to lose by estrangement. You and he are the losers, and that to a heavy amount, as you shall learn some day.'

'I have not come with any message from my father.'

'You've come for yourself, have you?

You think that Langford would be a fine farm for the growth of wild oats? You shan't try it.'

'I came here of my own accord,' said the young man. 'My father knows nothing of my purpose. I have come to tell you that I am very sorry for what I did,—what I did, I dare say you have not heard, as you have been away. You shall hear from me.'

'What have you done? Some foolery, I warrant.'

'Yes, uncle, something worse than foolery. The night you were away, and when we did not know but you were at Langford, there was a hare hunt before your doors.'

'What!' almost screamed the old man.

Physick was unable to restrain a laugh.

'There was a hare hunt, and I was in it. I took a principal part. I was thrown from my horse, and picked up unconscious, and the thing came to an end, it went no further. I have been badly hurt. I might have been killed.'

'And pray how came that about?' asked the old man quivering with anger. 'A light from heaven—struck you to the ground, like Saul when breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the Elect? And now you're a converted character, eh? and so think I'll take you back into favour, and let you have Langford?'

'No, uncle. I do not know quite what it was threw me down. Don't think me mad if I say it—but it seemed to me to be old Wellon rising from the cairn and rushing down on me, to strike me to the earth.'

Langford looked at him with amazement.

'I tell you just what happened. I was riding in the hunt—more shame to me—and I had the horn to my lips, and was just by the Gibbet Hill, when my piebald stood bolt still, and shivered with fear, and all at once there came a yellow light out of the barrow, and a great black figure with flapping clothes about it and I remember no more.'

Langford was like the rest of his class, full of belief in the supernatural. Larry spoke with such earnestness of tone, his face so fully expressed his conviction, that the old man was awed.

'I have broken my right arm and collar-bone. I have suffered a great deal, I have not slept for three nights, and this is the first day I have been out of my bedroom. Uncle Taverner, I made up my mind the very first night, that I would come to you directly I was able, and tell you that I am ashamed of myself. When the fellows were carrying me away on a gate, and I woke up—then I knew I had done wrong. I was warned beforehand twice to have nothing to do with the hunt. I heard those who were carrying me say how bad I behaved in taking part in the game against my own uncle. There—uncle! I'm very sorry, and I hope I'll never be such a fool and so wicked again.'

Taverner's lips quivered, whether from

suppressed rage, or from a rising better emotion, neither Physick nor Larry knew, for they left the room, whilst the old man stared after them with his dark brows contracted over his keen, twinkling eyes, and he sat motionless, and without speaking.

Larry was some little while getting into the gig. Mrs. Veale stood on the doorsteps watching him. All at once they heard a cry from the inside of the house—a cry, whether of terror, or rage, or pain, could not be told.

'What is it?' asked Physick. 'What's the matter?'

'It's master,' said Mrs. Veale; 'something has disagreed with him, I reckon.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BLOW.

Honor felt like one who has looked into the lightning. A glimpse of surpassing light, a vision into a heaven of fire, was succeeded by darkness and numbness of mind.

She was unable for some while to recover her mental and moral balance. The joy that had wrapped her soul as in flame had left a pain of fire. What had she done? What would come of this? Must she go on or could she step back? The moment when Larry's lips had met her cheek, and his words of love had rushed in at her ear and boiled through her veins, had been one in which her self-control had deserted her.

She thought over and over what had taken place. She felt his grasp of her hand, his arm about her neck, the pressure of his lips. What must follow on this? She had not withdrawn herself from him at his touch. She could not have done so. The power of resistance had left her. But now, as her clear mind arranged duties and weighed them against passion, she was doubtful what to do. It was strange for her to feel need of advice, to be forced to ask another what to do, yet now she felt that she could not judge for herself; but she also knew of no one who could advise her. There was nothing for her but to wait. Her simple faith raised her soul to God, and she prayed for a right judgment. She would leave the future in His hands: events must decide her course for her. Of one thing she was clear in her view: her duty to her father and brothers and sisters —she must not desert them. Whether she must wholly surrender her happiness for them, or whether she could combine her duty with her

inclination, she could not tell; that Larry and the future must decide.

She waited in patience. She knew that he would come to her as soon as he could. She heard daily from Chimsworthy how he was. Little Joe ran up and inquired.

She saw him drive by with Mr. Physick. Whither was he going? To Okehampton? It was not the shortest road. As he passed the cottage his face was turned towards it, and she saw his eyes looking for her, but the gig was not arrested. She was in the house, and had but a glimpse of him through the open door. Whether he had seen her or not she could not tell.

Presently he returned. He must have been to Langford. She stood in the doorway, and their eyes met. He did not stay the horse; he could not. He sat beside the lawyer, who was driving, and the broken right arm was near the reins. Physick was between him and Honor; but Larry turned his head and looked at her

as the trap went by. How pale and thin he seemed! What marks of suffering were on his face! The tears of pity came into Honor's eyes.

'He will come and see me soon,' she said to herself. 'May I have my strength to do what is right.' Then she seated herself at her work.

Kate was in the house, lively as a finch. Honor was always reserved; she was now more silent than usual. Kate's humour was unusually lively. Her tongue moved as nimbly as her feet and fingers, her conversation sparkled, and her tones danced like her eyes. When she was not talking she was singing. She made her jokes and laughed over them herself, as Honor was in no laughing mood.

Oddly enough, Sam Voaden was daily in the lane. He came round by the cottage from Swaddledown to ask at Chimsworthy after Larry; he made two miles out of a journey that need not have been three-quarters across the fields. When Sam went by he whistled

very loud, and then Kate found that the pitcher was empty and needed replenishing at the well; on such occasions, moreover, the pitcher took a long time filling. Kate made no secret of her heart's affairs to her sister. It was in her nature to talk, and a girl in love likes nothing better, when not with her lover, than to talk about him.

Honor put away her needlework and got the supper-table ready, and whilst she was putting the cold pasty on the table her father walked in. He was going next day to Tavistock, and had been round for commissions.

He was out of spirits, did not say much, wiped his face with his sleeve, and complained of the weather—it was sultry, he was tired. Some of his customers had been exacting and had worried him. 'The pasty is heavy; it goes against me,' he grumbled. 'All well for young appetites.'

'Shall I do you a bit of bacon, father?' asked Honor.

'Rich that,' he said discontentedly. 'I'm fanciful in my eating. I can't help it; I'm too poor to have what would suit me. It is in my constitution. Those who have the constitutions of gentlefolk want the food of gentlefolk.' He took a little piece of pasty, but pushed it away. 'It makes my throat rise; look at that great hunch of suet in it, like a horse-tooth (quartz spar) in granite. I can't eat anything; you may clear away.'

Actually Oliver Luxmore had eaten supper at one of the farms; that was why he had now no appetite; but he made occasion of his having no relish for his food to grumble and make Honor uncomfortable.

'The fog was a hunting this morning, so we've had a fine day for going nowhere, and it's gone a fishing this evening, to let me understand it will rain to-morrow when I go into Tavistock. It is always so. Rain on market days to spoil my custom and run away with profits.'

In explanation of his words, it is necessary to say that, when the white fog mounts the hills it is said to go hunting, when it lies along the rivers it is said to be fishing, and these conditions of fog are weather indications.

'I don't know what you call that,' said Oliver, pointing with his fork to a piece of meat in the pasty. 'It looks to me as if it were a goat caterpillar got in. I suppose you found it crawling across the lane from one of the willow trees, and, because we're poor and can't afford meat, stuck it in.'

'Father, it is wholesome; it is nothing but a bit of pig-crackling. You know we were given a piece of young pork by Mrs. Voaden, the other day.'

Then Oliver sprang to his feet, and Honor started back in surprise.

Without a word of salutation, with white face, and glaring eyes, with hand extended and shaking, Taverner Langford came in at the door.

'There! there!' he said, in a voice raised almost to a scream. 'This is what comes of doing a favour. Now I am punished.'

'What is the matter, Mr. Langford?' asked the carrier deferentially.

'What is the matter? Everything is the matter,' he cried. He turned to Honor: 'It is your doing, yours, yours.'

'What have I done?' she asked, with composure.

'You asked me to take him in; the scoundrel, the rogue.'

'You cannot mean my brother Charles,' said Honor, with dignity; 'or you would not speak thus under our roof to his father and sisters.'

'Oh no, of course not, you don't like to hear it; but that is what he is.'

'What has Charles done?' asked Oliver in alarm.

'Robbed me!' shrieked Taverner, with his whole body quivering, and with vehement

action of his hands. 'Robbed me, and run away with my money.'

He gasped for breath, his eyes glared, the sweat ran off his brow. He was without his hat, he had run bareheaded from Langford, and his grizzled hair was disordered.

'He has robbed me of nigh on a thousand pounds, and he has gone away with the money. He took occasion of my being from home; he has taken all—all—all I had laid by. I thought no one knew where was my bank. He must have watched me; he found out; he has taken the box and all its contents.'

'Charles could not, would not, do such a thing,' said Honor, with heaving bosom; she was more angry at the charge than alarmed.

'Could not! would not! Where is he now?'

'I do not know. We have not seen him for several days.'

'He has not been seen at Langford either. As soon as I was off to Holsworthy he

bolted. He knew he would have three days clear, perhaps more, for getting away with the money.'

'It is impossible,' said Honor. 'Charles may be idle, but he is not wicked.'

'He has robbed me,' repeated Taverner vehemently. 'Do you want proof? The five pound note.'

Honor shuddered; she had forgotten that.

'Do you remember, Luxmore, you paid me a note of the Exeter and Plymouth Bank? Do you remember that I took the number?'

Oliver looked helplessly about the room, from Langford to Honor and Kate.

'I ask you, whence you got that note? Come, answer me that? You, Luxmore, who gave you that note?'

'Charles,' moaned the carrier, and covered his face with his hands, as he threw himself into a chair.

'I thought as much. Let me tell you that that note had been abstracted from my box.

I had the list of all the notes in it, but I did not go over them till I found that I had been robbed. Here is the note. I did not restore it to the box. I kept it in my pocket-book. I can swear—I have my entries to prove it—that it had been stolen from me. When I found Charles was gone, I thought it must have been he who had robbed me. When I saw the number of the note agreed with one I had put into the box a month ago, then I knew it must be he. You brought me the note, and he is your son.'

Kate burst into tears and wrung her hands.

Honor saw the faces of the children frightened, inclined for tears; she sent them all upstairs to their bedrooms.

Oliver sat at the table with his forehead in his hands, and his fingers in his hair.

None spoke. Langford looked at the carrier, then at Honor. Kate threw herself into the chair by the window and wept aloud. Honor stood in the middle of the room, with

her head bent; she was deadly pale, she dared not raise her eyes.

'What will you do?' she asked in a low tone.

'Do!' exclaimed Taverner; 'Oh, that is soon answered. I send at once to Tavistock, Launceston, and Okehampton, and communicate with the proper authorities and have him arrested. There are magistrates, and constables, and laws, and prisons in England, for the detention and chastisement of thieves and burglars.'

Oliver moaned. 'I cannot bear the disgrace. I shall drown myself.'

'What will that avail?' sneered Langford. 'Will it save my thousand pounds? Will it save Charles from transportation? It is a pity that there is no more hanging for robbery, or Wellon's mound would be handy, and the old gibbet beam in my barn would serve once more.'

The words were cruel. Honor's teeth clenched and her hands closed convulsively.

Then Oliver Luxmore withdrew his hands from his face, dragged himself towards Langford, and threw himself on the ground at his feet.

'Have pity on him, on me, on us all. The shame will kill us, brand us. It will kill me, it will stain my name, my children, for ever.'

'Get up,' said Langford, roughly. 'I'm not to be moved by men's tears.'

But Oliver was deaf; his great absorbing agony momentarily gave dignity to his feeble pitiful character, to him even crouching on the slate floor.

'Spare us the dishonour,' he pleaded. 'I cannot bear it; this one thing I cannot. Luxmore—thief—convict!' He passed his hand over his brow and raised his eyes; they were blank. 'Luxmore, of Coombe Park—Luxmore! Take care!' his voice became shrill. 'Dishonour I cannot bear. Take care lest you drive me desperate. Rather let us all die, I, Honor, Kate, and the little ones, and end the

name, than that it should live on stained.' He tried to rise, but his knees shook and gave way under him.

'You may sell all I have. Take the van, everything. We cannot find you a thousand pounds. We will all work as slaves—only—spare us the dishonour! spare us this!'

Kate came up and cast herself at her father's side and raised her streaming eyes.

'Well,' said Taverner, turning to Honor, 'do you alone not join? Are you too proud?'

'Mr. Langford,' she answered, with emotion, 'you are too hard. I pray to God, who is merciful.'

'You are proud! You are proud!' he said, scowling. 'You, Oliver Luxmore! you, Kate! do not kneel to me. Go, turn to her. The fate of Charles, the honour of your name, your happiness, that of your children, rest with her—with her!'

He looked at her.

She did not speak; she understood his

meaning. A pang as of a sword went through her soul. She raised her clenched hands and put them to her mouth, and pressed the knuckles against her teeth. In the agony of that moment she was near screaming.

'There!' said Langford, pointing to her. 'Look how haughty she is. But she must bend. Entreat her, or command her, as you will. With her the issue lies. I will wait till to-morrow at ten, and take no steps for the capture of Charles. If before that hour I have yes, it is well. I pay a thousand pounds for that yes. I shall be content. If not, then—' he did not finish the sentence; he went out at the door.

Then only did Honor give way. She saw as it were a cloud of blue smoke rising round her. She held out her hands, grasping, but catching nothing, and fell on the floor insensible.

CHAPTER XXX.

YES!

Honor could not rest in her bed that night. Oliver Luxmore in the adjoining room groaned and sighed, he was sleepless. Kate, who shared her bed, was awake and tossed from side to side. Poor Kate knew that the disgrace would separate her from Sam. She was too generous to urge her sister to make the costly sacrifice. Oliver felt that words would be unavailing, the matter must be left to Honor ; his best advocate was in her own conscience. The resolution one way or the other must be come to by Honor unresisted, unswayed. She lay still in her bed, but Kate knew she did not sleep. She lay with her hands clasped as in prayer on

her heaving bosom. Her eyes were on the little latticed window, and on a moth dancing dreamily up and down the panes, a large black moth that made the little diamonds of glass click at the stroke of its wings. Her hair over her brow was curled with the heat of her brain, the light short hair that would not be brushed back and lie with the copper-gold strands. Great drops rolled off her forehead upon the pillow. Afterwards, Kate felt that the cover was wet, and thought it was with Honor's tears, but she was not crying. Her eyes were dry and burning, but the moisture poured off her brow. Her feet were like ice. She might have been dead, she lay so still. Kate hardly heard her breathe. She held her breath and listened once, as she feared Honor was in a swoon. She did not speak to her sister. An indefinable consciousness that Honor must not be disturbed, must be left alone, restrained her. Once she stole her hand under the bedclothes round her sister, and laid it on

her heart. Then she knew for certain what a raging storm was awake in that still, hardly breathing form.

That touch, unattended by word, was more than Honor could bear. She said nothing, but stole from bed, and put on some of her clothes. Kate watched her through her half-closed lids, and dared not speak or otherwise interfere. Honor went softly, barefooted down the stairs, that creaked beneath her tread. Her father heard the step. He knew whose it was. He also would not interfere. It was best for all—for Kate, for Charles, for himself, for Joe, and Pattie, and Willie, and Martha, and Charity, and little Temperance—that Honor should be wholly undisturbed.

The girl unfastened the back door, took up the little bench, cast a potato-sack over her head, and went forth, shutting the door gently behind her.

She carried the seat under the hedge in the paddock, where she had watched with Larry,

and placed herself on it, then rested her elbow on her knee, and her head in her hand. Her feet were bare, dipped in the dewy grass; a seeded dandelion, stirred by them, shed its ripe down over them. She thrust the sack from her head. She could not endure the weight and the heat, and laid it across her shoulders; from them it slipped unheeded. Her arms were bare from the elbow. The cold night wind stroked the arm that stayed up her scorched brain. She had prayed that God would guide her, and the guidance had led into a way of sorrows. 'It is expedient that one man should die for the people,' those words of the High Priest recurred to Honor, and she thought how that He to whom they referred had accepted the decision. She would have died—died! O how willingly, how eagerly!—for the dear ones under the thatched roof; she would have leaped into fire, not for all, but for any one of them, for little Temperance, for dear Charity, for Martha, for Willie, for darling

Pattie, for good, true Joe, for Kate, for her father of course—yes, even for Charles—but this that was demanded of her was worse than a brief spasm of pain in fire ; it was a lifelong martyrdom, a sacrifice infinitely more dreadful than of life. The thrushes were singing. There was no night in the midst of June, and the birds did without sleep, or slept in the glare of midday. The only night was within the girl's soul. There was no singing or piping there, but the groaning of a crushed spirit.

She started. She was touched. She put out her hand and sighed. The horse that Langford had let them have was in the paddock ; it had become much attached to Honor, and the beast had come over to her, unperceived, and was resting his head on her shoulder and rubbing it against her ear and cheek. She stroked the nose of the beast with her left hand without altering her position, mechanically, and without much diversion of her thoughts. When poor Diamond was dying

in the gravel pit, Honor had sat by him and caressed him; now Diamond's successor had come to comfort Honor, as best he could, when her girlhood was dying in anguish, passing into a womanhood of sorrow.

Chink! chink! chink! a finch was perched on the topmost twig of an alder that swayed under its light weight in the wind, repeating its monotonous cry, chink! chink! chink!

The cold about Honor's feet became stronger, the dew looked whiter, as if it were passing into frost, the breath of the horse was as steam. High, far aloft, in the dusky sky some large bird was winging its way from sea to sea, from the Atlantic boisterous barren coast about Bude, to the summer, luxuriant bays of the Channel. What bird it was Honor could not tell. She would not have seen it but that the winking of its wings as they caught the light from the north attracted her attention. Strange as it may seem, though engrossed in her own sorrows, she watched the flap of

the wings till they passed beyond range of vision.

Not a cloud was in the sky. The stars were but dimly seen in the silvery haze of summer twilight. One glowworm in the hedge opposite her shone brighter than any star, for it shone out of darkness deeper than the depths of heaven.

One long leaf near Honor was as if it had been varnished, wet with dew, and as the dew gathered on it, it stooped and the moisture ran to the lanceate end, bowing it further, and forming a clear drop; then the drop fell, and the leaf with a dancing rebound recovered its first position. Honor's eye rested on the leaf; as the dew formed on it, and bent it down, so were tears forming on her soul and bowing it. The leaf shook off the drop; would her spirit ever recover?

What wondrous sounds are heard at night! How mysterious, how undiscoverable in origin! It seemed to Honor less still in the meadow,

under the thorn hedge, than in the cottage. Insect life was stirring all about; the spiders were spinning, moths flitting, leaves rustling, birds piping, the wind playing among the thorns; the field mice were running, and the night birds watching for them on wing.

All was cool, all but Honor's head. Whatever sounds were heard were pleasant, whatever movement was soothing. Through all the intricate life that stirred there ran a breath of peace—only not over the heaving soul of Honor.

Poor Larry! Honor's thoughts were less of herself than of others. She was sure to the ground of her heart that he loved her. She knew, without riddling out the why and how, that she could have made him happy and good at once. There was sterling gold in him; the fire would purge away the dross. As in the cocoon there is an outer shell of worthless web which must be torn away before the golden thread is discovered, so was it with him; the

outer husk of vanity and idleness and inconsiderateness was coming away, and now all that was needed was a tender hand to find and take hold of the end of the thread and spin off the precious fibre. Another hand, rough and heedless, might break and confuse and ruin it.

But, though she knew she could have made Larry's life right and orderly, yet she would not undertake to do so unless she saw the other lives committed to her trust cared for and safe.

Above all, high as the highest star, in her pure soul shone the duty imposed on her by her mother. If she could not combine her duty to the dear ones under the brown thatch with the charge of Larry's destiny, she would not undertake the latter.

And now, most horrible gall to her womanly mind, came the knowledge that she—she whom Larry loved and looked up to—she, she who loved the careless lad, even she must step in between him and his uncle's property, that she

was chosen by old Langford as the weapon of his revenge on the Nanspians.

The Langford estate must descend to Larry should his uncle die childless, and she——

Her breath came in a gasp. She tore up the cold dockleaves and pressed them to her brow to cool the burning there, to take the sting out of her nettled brain.

There was no rest for Honor anywhere, in the meadow or in her bed—no rest for her evermore.

She rose and went back to the house, but when she reached the door, true to her regular habits, remembered that she had left the sack and the bench in the field, and went back, fetched them, and put each in its proper place. Nothing was ever left littering about by Honor. If she had been dying and had seen a chip on the floor, she would have striven to rise and remove it.

In the morning the carrier and his two eldest daughters looked haggard and pale.

The children seemed aware of trouble. Joe was attentive and helped to quiet and amuse the youngest, and watched his father, but especially Honor, to read what was menaced in their faces. He had not been at home when Langford came, and his sister Pattie could give him but the vaguest idea of what had occurred. All she knew was that it was a trouble connected with Charles, who had run away. The carrier had to be ready early to start for Tavistock market. Honor and Kate prepared breakfast for him and the children, without a word passing between them on what was uppermost in their minds. As they were eating, the Ashbury postboy passed down the lane and called at the steps.

The carrier went out.

'A letter for you.'

Oliver took and paid for it, then brought it in and opened it slowly with shaking fingers. He, Honor, Kate knew that it must have reference to their trouble. It was in the hand-

writing of Charles; it bore the Plymouth post-mark. The carrier spread it on his plate; he did not read it aloud because Joe and the other children were present; but Honor and Kate stood behind him and read over his shoulder without uttering a word.

This was the letter :—

'Dear Father,—I take my pen in hand, hopping this finds you has it leafs me, with a bad running at the noaz, and a shockin corf, gripes orful in my innerds, and hakes all over me. I dersay you've eard what I gone and done, don't judge me harshly, I couldn't do otherwise, and I'm not so bad to blame as you may suppoge. I didn't intend delibberat to do 't, but I did it off-hand so to speke. Wot's dun can't be undun. It's no use crying over spilt milk. Wot can't be kured must be undured. That's wot Mrs. Veale would say, and her's a bad un. I ketched a cold with getting wet running away, but I shall be all rite soon, please God when I'm away on the i seez. I'm

goin to Ameri'kay which is the place to which the flour of the British aristokracy go when its ockerd or embarassing at ome. As it is ockerd and embarassing to me, I'm orf, and I hope with the Almighty's aid to do well in the new whirld, wheer I intend to found a new Coom Park, to which I shall invite you all to come, when I can drive you about in a carridge and pare. I want to know how it is with Larry, whether he be alive or dead. I came away in such aste I couldn't stay to know, but I'm very desiring to know. Don't rite to me by my proper name, there may be disagreeables in my wereabout being knone, so direct to Mr. Charles, poast resteny, Plymouth.—From your loving sun,

'CHARLES LUXMORE.'

of Coom Park, Esquire.

P.S.—Doan't say nothink to nobody of were I be, wotever you do, and kiss the kids for me. Poast anser at Tavistock or Lanson.

Oliver Luxmore refolded the letter, and put

it away in his pocket without a word. Neither Honor nor Kate spoke or looked at each other. It was too clear to all that Charles was guilty. The last doubt of his guilt disappeared.

Oliver went about the horse and van. Honor did not fail to observe the change effected in him by one night. He seemed older by ten years—to have tumbled down the decline of life, and been shaken by the fall. His clothes did not appear to fit him, his walk was unsteady, his hand shook, his eye wandered, his hair had a greyer tinge, and was lank and moist. Joe ran to help in the harnessing of the horse. His father was trying to force on the collar without turning it. He put on the saddle wrong, and fastened the wrong buckles. The boy corrected his father's errors. Then the man brought the van into the lane, and stood with his hand to his forehead.

'I've forgotten 'em all,' he said. 'Whatever were the commissions I don't know.' The

whip was shaking in his hand as a withy by a waterbrook. 'I shouldn't wonder if I never came back,' he said, then looked up the steps at Honor. It was the first time he had met her eye since Taverner Langford had left the house. 'I shan't know what is to be till I come home,' he muttered. 'The cuckoo-clock has just called seven, and it is three hours to ten. I think my heart will die within me at Tavistock. I shan't be home till night. However I shall bear it and remember my commissions I do not know. Joe shall come with me. I can't think. I can't drive. I can do nothing.'

Then Honor came down the steps with her scarlet cloak about her shoulders, and her red stockings on her feet, slowly, looking deadly pale, and with dark rings about her eyes.

'Where are you going?' asked the carrier, 'not coming with me to Tavistock?'

She shook her head.

'Are you—are you going to—to Langford?' he asked. 'To say what?'—he held his breath.

'Yes!'

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE NEW MISTRESS.

'HALLOO! where be you off to, Red Spider?' asked Farmer Nanspian, who was on Broadbury, when he saw Honor Luxmore in her scarlet cloak coming over the down. 'Stay, stay!' he said, and put his hand to her chin to raise her face. 'You never come Chimsworthy road—leastways, you haven't yet. —Where be you going to now?'

'To Langford, sir.'

'To Langford, eh?' his face clouded. 'I didn't think you was on good terms with Mr. Langford. Take care—take care! I won't have he sloke away this Red Spider from Chimsworthy.' Then he nodded smiled, and

went on. He little knew, he had no suspicion, that what he hinted at was really menaced.

Honor went on to the old, lonely house, and asked to speak to Mr. Langford. She was shown into his parlour. Taverner was about the farm. She had some minutes to wait, and nerve herself for the interview, before he arrived.

'Well,' said he when he came in, 'you are in good time. You have brought me the answer.'

'Yes,' she replied, looking down.

'Do I take that Yes as a reply to this question or to that I made yesterday?'

'To both.'

'There's not another woman in all England to whom I'd have behaved as I have to you.'

'I hope not, sir!'

'I mean,' said Langford, knitting his brows, and reddening, 'I mean, I would not have foregone a thousand pounds for any other. I would not have spared the man who had robbed me for any other woman's sake.'

'I have come here,' she said, 'myself, instead of sending a message, because I wished to speak with you, in private.'

'There is no one here to overhear you. I have stopped up the keyhole; Mrs. Veale listened, she can catch nothing now.'

'Mr. Langford, I was told by my father that you had promised to do something for my brother and sisters.'

'Oh, do not be afraid—I will do something for them.'

'I want you to grant me one request, the only one I will ever make of you. Promise me some small yearly sum assured to my father, I do not ask for much. When I am in the house, I can manage, but it is hard work for me to do so. When I am gone, Kate will find it hard, and she may not remain long there; she is a pretty girl, and has her admirers, she is sure to marry soon—then what will become of my father and the little ones? I do not ask you to take them in here. That would not be

reasonable—except so far as they can work for you, and be of use to you—Joe will be a valuable servant, and Pattie is growing up to be neat and active and thoughtful.'

'How many more?' asked Langford.

'That is all,' replied Honor quietly. 'If I ask you to do anything for these two it is only because they will be worth more than you will pay them. But I ask for my father. It will be a loss to him, my leaving the house. He will not be happy. Kate is very good, but she does not understand thrift, and she is light-hearted. Promise me a small sum every year for my father aud the little ones to relieve them from the pinch of poverty, and to give them ease and happiness.'

'How many have you?'

'There are Joe, and Pattie, Willie, Martha, Charity, and Temperance. If I might bring Temperance with me I should be very thankful; she is but three, and will miss me.'

'In the Proverbs of Solomon we are told

that the horseleech hath three daughters, which cry Give, give, give! Here are more, some seven, all wanting to suck blood. If I marry you, I don't marry the family.'

Honor was silent, for a moment, recovering herself; his rudeness hurt her, angered her.

'I make a request. I will ask nothing more.'

She looked up at him, and rested her eyes on his face. He had been observing her; how pale she was—how worn; and it annoyed him: it seemed to him that it had cost her much to resolve to take him; and this was not flattering to his pride.

'I cannot grant it,' he said. 'It is not reasonable. I am not going to be eaten out of house and home by a parcel of ravenous schoolchildren. I want you, I do not want all your tail of brothers and sisters, and, worst of all, your helpless father. I know very well what will happen. I shall be thrown to them like an old horse to Squire Impey's pack—to have my flesh torn off, and my bones even

crunched up. I cut this away in the beginning; I will not have it.'

'I ask only for a small sum of money for my father. The van barely sustains him. The family is so large. I will not bring any of the children here, except little Temperance, who is very, very dear to my heart.'

'No, I will have none of them.'

'I may not have Temperance?'

'No, I said, none of them. Give an inch, and an ell is taken. Put in the little finger and the fist follows.'

'Then you will grant me an allowance for my father?'

He laughed. 'A thousand pounds is what you have cost me. When that thousand pounds is made up, or repaid, then we will talk about an allowance. Not till then—no, no! I may pay too dear for my bargain. A thousand pounds is ample.'

'That is your last word?'

'My last.'

Then Honor, looking steadily at him, said: 'Mr. Langford, it is true that you lose money by me; but I lose what is infinitely more precious by you. I lose my whole life's happiness. When my mother was dying, I promised her to be a mother to her darlings. Now I am put in this terrible position, that, to save them from a great disgrace and an indelible stain, I must leave them. I have spent the whole night thinking out what was right for me to do. If I remain with them, it is with a shame over our whole family. If I go, I save them from that, but they lose my care. One way or other there is something gone. It cannot be other. I have made my choice. I will come to you; but I have strings from my heart to little Temperance, and Charity, and Martha, and Willie, and Pattie, and Joe, and Kate, and father. If they are unhappy, uncomfortable, I shall suffer in my soul. If ill comes to them, I shall be in pain. If the little ones grow up neglected, untidy, untruthful, my heart and my

head will ache night and day. If my father is uncared for, the distress of knowing it will be on me ever. I shall be drawn by a hundred nerves to my own dear ones, and not be able to do anything for them. You cannot understand me. You must believe me when I say that the loss to me is ten thousand times greater than the loss of a thousand pounds to you. My happiness is in the well-being and well-bringing up of my brothers and sisters. You take all that away from me. Did you ever hear the tale of the widower who married again, and his new wife neglected the children by the dead wife?—One night the father came to the nursery door, and saw the dead woman rocking and soothing the babes. She had come from her grave. The crying had drawn her. She could not sleep because they called her. I do not know that I can bear it, to be separated from my brothers and sisters—I cannot say—if they suffered or were neglected—I fancy nothing could withhold me from going to them.'

Taverner remained silent: her eyes seemed to burn their way into him. She shifted her position from one foot to the other; and went on, in an earnest tone, with a vibration in it from the strength of her emotion: 'I am bound to tell you all. If you are to be my husband, you must know everything. I cannot love you. What love I have that is not taken up by Temperance, and Charity, and Martha, and Willie, and Pattie, and Joe, and Kate, and father, and——' still looking frankly, earnestly at him, 'yes, and by Charles, I have given elsewhere. I cannot help it. It has been taken from me in a whirlwind of fire, as Elijah was caught up into heaven; it is gone from me; I cannot call it down again. If you insist on knowing to whom I gave it, I will tell you, but not now, not yet—afterwards. To show you, Mr. Langford, how I love my home, I had made up my mind to give him up, to throw away all that beautiful happiness, to forget it as one forgets a dream, because I

would not be parted from my dear ones. I was resolved to give him up whom I love for them, and now I am required to give them up for you whom I love not.' She breathed heavily, her labouring heart beat. She drew the red cloak about her, lest the heaving bosom and bounding heart should be noticed. Langford saw the long drops run down her brow, but there were no tears in her eyes.

'You will never love me?' he asked.

'I cannot say; it depends how you treat my dear ones.'

She took a long breath.

'There is one reason why my consent costs me more when given to you than to another; but I cannot tell you that now. I will tell you later.'

She meant that by marrying him she was widening the breach between the uncle and nephew—that she was marrying the former for the express purpose of depriving the latter of his inheritance. She could not tell Langford this now.

'I will do my duty by you to the best of my lights. But I shall have one duty tying me here, and seven drawing me to the little cottage in the lane, and I feel—I feel that I shall be torn to pieces.'

Taverner Langford stood up and paced the room with his arms folded behind his back. His head was bowed and his cheeks pale. The girl said no more. She again shifted her feet, and rested both hands, under her cloak, on the table. Langford looked round at her; her head was bent, her yellow-brown hair was tied in a knot behind. As her head was stooping, the back of her neck showed above the red cloak. It was as though she bent before the executioner's axe. He turned away.

'Sit down,' he said. 'Why have you been standing? You look ill. What has ailed you?'

'In body nothing,' she answered.

'Who is it?' he asked surlily, looking out of the window, and passing his own fingers over his face.

She slightly raised her head and eyes questioningly.

'I mean,' he said, without turning to see her, but understanding by her silence that she asked an explanation—'I allude to what you were saying just now. Who is it whom you fancy?'

'If you insist, I will tell. If you have any pity you will spare me. In time—before the day, you shall know.'

He passed his hand over his face again.

'This is a pleasant prospect,' he said, but did not explain whether he alluded to the landscape or to his marriage. He said no more to force further confidence from her.

'Come,' said he, roughly, and he turned suddenly round, 'you shall see the house. You shall be shown what I have in it, all the rooms and the furniture, also the cowsheds, and the dairy—everything. You shall see what will be yours. You would get no other man with so much as I have.'

'Not to-day, Mr Langford. Let me go home. I should see nothing to-day. My eyes are full, and my heart fuller.'

'Then go,' he said, and reseated himself at the table.

She moved towards the door. He had his chin on his hand, and was looking at the grate. She hesitated, holding the handle.

'Hah!' exclaimed Langford, starting up. 'Did you hear that? a-fluttering down the passage? That was Mrs. Veale, trying to listen, but could hear nothing; trying to peep, but could see nothing, because I have covered every chink. Come here! come here, Mrs. Veale!'

As she did not respond, he rang the bell violently, and the pale woman came.

'Come here, Mrs. Veale! show the future mistress out of the house! Not by the kitchen, woman! Unbar the great door. Show her out, and curtsey to her, and at the same time take your own discharge.'

'"When one comes in the other goes out," as the man said of the woman in the weather-house,' remarked Mrs. Veale with a sneer. She curtsied profoundly. 'There's been calm heretofore. Now comes storm.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CHINA DOG.

No sooner was the scarlet cloak gone than Mrs. Veale leaned back against the wall in the passage and laughed. Langford had never heard her laugh before, and the noise she made now was unpleasant. Her face was grey, her pale eyes glimmered in the dark passage.

'Will you be quiet?' said Taverner angrily. 'Get along with you into the kitchen and don't stand gulping here like water out of a narrow-necked bottle.'

'So!—that be the wife you've chosen, master! It is ill screwing a big foot into a small shoe; best suit your shoe to the size of your foot.'

'You have received notice to leave. A month from to-day.'

'This is breaking the looking-glass because you don't like your face,' said the housekeeper. '"Come help me on with the plough," said the ox to the gadfly. "With the greatest of pleasure," answered the fly, and stung the ox.'

'Gadfly!' shouted Taverner. 'Sheathe your sting, please, or don't practise on me.'

'You marry!' scoffed Mrs. Veale '"I'm partial to honey," said the fox, and upset the hive. "You must learn how to take it," answered the swarm, and surrounded him.'

'I'll turn you out at once,' said Langford, angrily.

'No, you will not,' answered the housekeeper; 'or you will have to pay my wage and get nothing for it. I've served you faithfully all these years, and this is my reward. I am turned away. What has been my pay whilst here? What! compared with my services? And now I am to make room for the

sister of a thief. What will become of your earnings when she comes? If her brother picked a stranger, he will skin a relative. And the rest of them! "I am tilling for you," said the farmer to the rabbits; "come into my field and nibble the turnips." Love in an old man is like a spark in a stackyard. It burns up everything, even common sense.'

He thrust her down the passage. She kept her white face towards him, and went along sliding her hands against the wall, against which she leaned her back.

'I did suppose you had more sense than this. I knew you were bit, but not that you were poisoned. I thought that you would be too wise to go on with your courting when you found that you had been robbed by Charles. Who that is not a fool will give the run of his house to the man who has plundered him? Can you keep him out when you have married his sister? What of the young ones? They will grow up like their brother. Roguery is

like measles, it runs through a house. Have not I been faithful? Have I taken a thread out of your clothes, or a nail from your shoe? Have I relations to pester you for help? Mine might have begged, but would not have stolen; yours will have their hands in all your pockets. Now you are everything in the house, and we are all your slaves. All is yours, your voice rules, your will governs. Will it be so when you bring a mistress home—and that Honor Luxmore? Everyone knows her; she governs the house.' Mrs. Veale laughed again. 'That will be a fine sight to see Master Taverner Langford under the slipper. "I'm seen in the half but lost in the full," said the man in the moon.'

Langford thrust her through the kitchen door and shut it, then returned to his parlour, where he bolted himself in, and paced the room with his arms folded behind his back.

There was enough of truth in what Mrs. Veale had said to make him feel uncomfortable.

It was true that now he was absolute in his house; but would he reign as independently when married? Was not the ox inviting the gadfly to help to draw the plough? In going after the honey, like the fox, was he not inviting stings?

Langford had suffered great loss from rabbits. They came out of Chimsworthy plantation and fell on his turnips, nibbled pieces out of hundreds, spoiling whole rows, which when touched rotted with the first frost. Therefore Mrs. Veale's allusion to them went home. Yes!—there were a swarm of human rabbits threatening, the children from the cottage. They would all prey on him. He was inviting them to do so. 'I till for you,' said the farmer. Confound Mrs. Veale! Why was she so full of saws and likenesses that cut like knives? And Charles!—of course he would return when he knew that he would not be prosecuted. How could he be prosecuted when the brother-in-law of the man he had

robbed? When he returned, how could he be kept away, how prevented from further rascality? A thousand pounds gone! and he was not to punish the man who had taken the money. This was inviting him to come and rob him again. He did not think much of what Honor had said of an attachment to some unknown person. Taverner had never loved, and knew nothing of love as a passion. He regarded it as an ephemeral fancy. Every girl thought herself in love, got over it, and bore no scars. It would be so with Honor. Presently he rang for his breakfast. Mrs. Veale came in. She saw he was disconcerted, but she said nothing, till the tray was on the table, and she was leaving; then, holding the handle of the door, she said, 'It is a pity.'

'What is a pity?'

'The hare hunt.'

'What of that?' he asked angrily.

'That it was not put off a month, then changed to a stag hunt,' she replied, and went through the door quickly, lest he should knock her down.

Mrs. Veale went to her kitchen, and seated herself by the fire. She was paler than usual, and her eyelids blinked nervously. There was work to be done that morning, but she neglected it.

Her scheme had failed. She had endeavoured to force Charles Luxmore on to steal of his master, thinking that this must inevitably break the connection with the Luxmores. Taverner, she thought, could not possibly pursue his intentions when he knew he had been robbed by Charles. She was disappointed. What next to attempt she knew not. She was determined to prevent the marriage if she could. She had not originally intended to steal the cash-box, nor, indeed, to rob it of any of its contents, but she had been forced to take it, as Charles would not. Now she was given her dismissal, and if she left, she would take the money with her. But she had no desire to leave without further punishment of her ungrateful master. She had spent fifteen years

in his service. She had plotted and worked and had not gained any of her ends. She had at first resolved on making him marry her. When she found it impossible to achieve this, she determined to make herself so useful to him, so indispensable, that he would in his old age fall under her power, and then, he would leave her by his will well off. She was now to be driven out into the cold, after all her labour, disappointments, to make room for a young girl. This should not be. If she must go, she would mar the sport behind her back. If Taverner Langford would not take her, he should take none other. If she was not to be mistress in the house, no young chit of a girl should be.

She stood up and took down from the chimney-piece a china dog blotched red, and turning it over, removed from the inside a packet of yellow paper.

She was so engrossed in her thoughts that she did not see that someone had entered the kitchen by the open backdoor.

'I declare! They'd make a pair!'

Mrs. Veale started, a shiver ran through her from head to foot. She turned, still quivering, and looked at the speaker. Kate Luxmore had entered, and stood near the table.

'Well, now,' said Kate, 'this is curious. We've got a dog just like that, with long curly ears, and turns his dear old head to the left, and you've one with the same ears, and same colour, turns his head to the right. We'd a pair once, but Joe broke the fellow. I reckon you'd a pair once, but your fellow is broke. 'Tis a pity they two dogs should be widowers and lonely.'

Mrs. Veale stared at her; Kate had never been there before. What had brought her there now? Were all the Luxmores coming to make that their home, even before the marriage?

'And what have you got there?' pursued Kate, full of liveliness. 'Why, that is one of the yellow paper rat-poison packets the man

sold at the fair. I know it. 'Tis a queer thing you keeping the poison in the body of the dog. But I suppose you are right; no one would think to go there for it.'

'What do you want here?' asked Mrs. Veale, hastily replacing the packet and the dog on the mantel-shelf. 'Why have you come? We've had enough of you Luxmores already. Your brother Charles has played us a pretty tune, and now your sister's like to lead a dance.'

'I have come for Honor. Is she here?'

'She—no! She's been gone some time. Ain't she home? Perhaps she's walking over the land, and counting the acres that may be hers, and prizing the fleeces of the sheep.'

'She is wanted. As for Charles, there's naught proved against him, and till there is, I won't believe it. I've just had a talk with someone, and he tells me another tale altogether. So there—not another word against poor Charles. He wasn't ever sweet on you,

I can tell you. 'Tis a pity, too, about those dogs. They're both water-spaniels—what intelligent eyes they have, and what lovely long curly ears! They ought to be a pair some day.'

'I tell you,' said Mrs. Veale, 'your sister is not here.'

'Our dog,' went on Kate, unabashed, 'don't belong to father. He is Honor's own. She had the pair, till Joe knocked one of them over. Her mother gave it her. 'Tis curious now that her dog should turn his blessed nose one way, and this dog should turn his nose the other way. It looks as if they were made for each other, which is more than is the case with some that want to be pairing. A mantel-shelf don't look as well with a spaniel in the middle as it do with one at each end. That is, I suppose, why your master is looking out for a wife. Well! I think he'd have matched better with you than with someone else whom I won't name. A house with one in it is like a mantel-

shelf with one odd dog on it. Does this chimney ornament belong to you or to the house?'

'Never mind, go your ways. Don't you think ever to pair them two dogs, nor your sister and the master. There is a third to be considered. If one be broken, there is no pairing. Do y' know what the ash said to the axe?

> Whether coupled or counter is wisht (unlucky) for me,
> My wood makes the haft for to fell my tree.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AMONG THE GORSE.

'WHERE be you going to, Larry?' asked his father. 'I've just seen the Red Spider running Langford way. Take care Uncle Taverner don't sloke that one away as he tried to sloke t'other.'

Hearing that Honor was gone over the moor to Langford, Hillary took that direction, and, as he had expected, encountered her as she was returning to her cottage, before she had left the down.

'You are going to give me a quarter of an hour,' said Larry. I dare say you may be busy, but I can't spare you till we've had it out with each other. I've but one arm now that I

can use, but I'll bar the way with that, if you attempt to escape me.'

Honor looked at him hesitatingly. She was hardly prepared for the inevitable trial, then. She would have liked to defer it. But, on second thoughts, she considered that it was best to have it over. Sooner or later, an explanation must be made, so perhaps it would be as well for her that day to pass through all the fires. There on Broadbury, when the gorse is swaled (burnt), the cattle are driven through the flames. They plunge and resist, but a ring of men and dogs encloses them, armed with sharp stakes, and goad them forward, and at last, with desperation, lowing, kicking, leaping, angry and terrified, they plunge through the flames. Honor thought of this familiar scene, and that she was herself being driven on. Sooner or later she must enter the fire, be scorched, and pass through ; she would traverse it without further resistance at once.

'I am ready, Larry,' she said in a low voice.

'My dear, dear Honor, what ails you? You are looking ill, and deadly white! What is it, Honor?'

'We all have our troubles, Larry. You have a broken arm, and I have a breakage somewhere, but never mind where.'

'I do mind,' he said vehemently. 'What is amiss?'

'You told me, Larry, the night your arm was hurt, that—your pride had sustained a fall and was broken.'

'So it was.'

'So also is mine.'

'But what has hurt you? How is it? Explain to me all, Honor.'

She shook her head. 'It is not my affair only. I have others to consider beside myself, and you must forgive me if my lips are locked.'

He put his left arm round her, to draw her

to him, and kiss her. 'I will keep the key of those lips,' he said, but she twisted herself from his grasp.

'You must not do that, Larry.'

'Why not? We understand each other. Though we did not speak, that night, our hearts told each other everything.'

'Larry, do you remember what I said to you when we were together in the paddock?'

'I remember every word.'

'I told you that I regarded you—as a brother.'

'I remember every word but that.'

'You have been a friend, a dear friend, ever since we were children. You were always thoughtful towards us, my sister and me, when you thought of nothing else. You were always kind, and as Charles was away, of late, I came to think of you as a brother.'

'But I, Honor, I never have and never will consent to regard you as a sister. I love you more dearly than brother ever loved sister.

I never had one of my own, but I am quite sure I could not think of one in the way I think of you. I love you, Honor, with all my heart, and I respect you and look up to you as the only person who can make me lead a better life than I have led heretofore.'

Honor shook her head and sighed. It was her way to answer by nod or shake rather than by word.

'I have good news to tell you,' he went on; 'my father is delighted at the prospect, and he is nearly as impatient as I am to have your dear self in Chimsworthy.'

'I cannot go there,' said Honor in a tone that expressed the desolation of her heart.

'Why not?'

She hesitated.

'Why not, Honor? When I wish it, when my father is eager to receive you?'

'Dear Larry,' she said sadly, 'it can never, never be.'

'Come here,' he exclaimed impatiently, and

drew her along with him. 'What is the meaning of this? I will understand.' Before them for nearly a mile lay a sheet of gold, a dense mass of unbroken gorse, in full blaze of flower, exhaling a nectareous fragrance in the sun, that filled the air. So dense were the flowers that no green spines could be seen, only various shades of orange and gold and pale yellow. Through it a path had been reaped, for rabbit-shooters, and along this Hillary drew her. The gorse reached to their waists. The fragrance was intoxicating.

'Look here, Honor,' said he, 'look at this furze. It is like my nature. It is said that there is not a month in the year in which it does not blossom. Sometimes there is only a golden speck here and there—when the snow is on the ground, not more than a few flowers, and then one stalk sets fire to another, as spring comes on, and the whole bush burns and is not consumed, like that in the desert, when God spoke to Moses from it. It has

been so with me, Honor. I have always loved you. Sometimes the prickles have been too thick, and then there have been but few tokens of love; but never, never has the bloom died away altogether. In my heart, Honor, love has always lived, and now it is all blazing, and shining, and full of sweetness.'

'Larry,' answered Honor slowly, 'look here;' she put her hand to a gorse bush and plucked a mass of golden bloom.

'Honor!' he exclaimed, 'what have you done?' She opened her hand, it was full of blood.

'I have grasped the glorious flower,' she said, 'and am covered with wounds, and pierced with thorns.'

'No—no, dear Honor,' he said, taking her hand, removing from it the prickles, and wiping the blood away with the kerchief that bound his broken arm. 'There shall be no thorns in our life together. The thorns will all go from me when I have you to prune me.

I have been wild and rough, and I dare say I may have given you pain. I know that I have. I was angry with you and behaved badly; but I was angry only because I loved you.' Then his pleasant sweet smile broke over his pale face, and he said in an altered tone, 'You do not harbour anger, Honor; you forgive, when the offender is repentant.'

She raised her eyes to him, and looked long and steadily into his.

'I forgive you for any little wrong you may have done me, heartily and wholly. But, O Larry! I must wrong you in a way in which I can expect to get no forgiveness from you.'

'That is quite impossible,' he said, smiling.

'Larry, you cannot even dream what my meaning is. When you know—there will not be a flower on the furze-bush, the last gold bud of love will fall off.'

'Never, never, Honor!'

'You do not know.'

He was perplexed. What could stand in the way of her ready acceptance of him, except his own former bad conduct?

'Honor,' he said, 'I have had some sleepless nights—these have not been altogether caused by my arm—and during the dark hours I have thought over all my past manner of life, and I have quite resolved to break with it. I will no longer be idle. I will no more boast. I will no more let the girls make a fool of me. I will work hard on the farm as any labourer—indeed, Honor, I will work harder and longer than they. If you mistrust me, prove me. I deserve this trial. My father would like you to be his daughter-in-law at once; but I know that I do not deserve you. In the old story, Jacob served fourteen years for Rachel, and I am not a Jacob—I will wait, though fourteen years is more than my patience will bear, still—dear Honor, dear heart!—I will wait. I will wait your own time, I will not say another word to you till

you see that I am keeping my promise, and am becoming in some little way worthy of you. I know,' he said in a humble tone, 'that really I can never deserve you—but I shall be happy to try and gain your approval, and, if you do not wish me to say more of my love till I show you I am on the mend, so shall it be. I am content. Put on the kerchief when I am to speak again.'

He stopped, and looked at her. She was trembling, and her eyes cast down. Now, at last, the tears had come, and were flowing from her eyes. One, like a crystal, hung on her red cloak. Knowing that he awaited an answer, she raised her head with an effort, and looked despairingly right and left, but saw no help anywhere, only the flare of yellow blossom flickering through a veil of tears.

O, infinitely sweet, infinitely glorious was this sight and this outpouring of Larry's heart to her—but infinitely painful as well—piercing, wounding, drawing forth blood—like the gorse.

'Larry!' she said earnestly, 'No—no—not for one moment do I doubt your word. I believe everything you say. I could trust you perfectly. I know that with your promise would come fufilment, but—it is not that.'

'What is it then?'

She *could* not tell him. The truth was too repugnant to her to think, much less to tell—and tell to *him*.

'I cannot tell you; my father, my brothers and sisters.'

'I have thought of that, you dear true soul,' he interrupted. 'I know that you will not wish to hurt them. But, Honor, there will be no desertion. I have only to cut a gap through the hedge of your paddock, and in three minutes, straight as an arrow, you can go from one house to the other. Round by the road is longer, but when you are at Chimsworthy we'll have a path between; then you can go to and fro as you like, and the little ones will be always on the run. You can have

them all in with you when and as long as you like; and my father will be over-pleased if your father will come and keep him company on the Look-out stone. Since Uncle Taverner and he have quarrelled father has been dull, and felt the want of some one to talk to. So you see all will be just right. Everything comes as though it were fitted to be as we are going to make it.'

Again he paused, waiting for her answer. Whilst he had been speaking she had worked herself up to the necessary pitch of resolution to tell him something—not all, no! all she could not tell.

'Larry! it cannot be. I am going to marry another.'

He stood still, motionless, not even breathing, gazing at her with stupid wonder. What she said was impossible. Then a puff of north-west wind came from the far ocean, rolling over the down, gathering the fragrance of the yellow sea, and condensing it; then poured it as a

breaking wave over the heads of those two standing in the lane cut through the golden trees. And with the odour came a humming, a low thrilling music, as the wind passed through the myriad spines beneath the foam of flower, and set them vibrating as the tongues of Æolian harps. The sweetness and the harmony were in the air, all around, only not in the hearts of those two young people, standing breast deep in the gorse-brake. The wind passed, and all was still once more. They stood opposite each other, speechless. Her hand, which he had let go, had fallen, and the blood dropped from it. How long they thus stood neither knew. He was looking at her; she had bent her head, and the sun on her hair was more glorious than on the gorse-flowers. He would have pierced to the depth of her soul and read it if he could, but he was baffled. There was an impenetrable veil over it, through which he could not see.

'You do not—you have not loved me,' he

said with an effort. This was the meaning of her coldness, her reserve. Then he put out his left hand and touched her, touched her lightly on the bosom. That light touch was powerful as the rod of Moses on the rock in Horeb. Her self-control deserted her. She clasped her hands on her breast, and bowed, and burst into convulsive weeping, which was made worse by her efforts to arrest it and to speak.

Hillary said nothing. He was too dazed to ask for any explanation, too stupefied by the unexpected declaration that cut away for ever the ground of his happiness.

She waved her hand. 'Leave me alone. Go, Larry, go! I can tell you nothing more! Let me alone! Oh, leave me alone, Larry!'

He could not refuse to obey, her distress was so great, her entreaty so urgent. Silent, filled with despair, with his eyes on the ground, he went along the straight-cut path towards the road, and nearly ran against Kate.

'Oh! you here!' exclaimed the lively girl, 'then Honor is not far distant. Where is she? What, yonder! and I have been to Langford to look for her. What is the matter? Oh, fiddlesticks! you have been making yourselves and each other miserable. There is no occasion for that till all is desperate, and it is not so yet. Come along, Larry, back to Honor. I must see her; I want to tell her something, and you may as well be by. You are almost one of the family.'

She made him follow her. Honor had recovered her composure when left to herself, unwatched, and she was able to disguise her emotions from her sister.

'Oh, Honor!' exclaimed Kate, 'I have something to tell you. I think you've been a fool, and too precipitate—I do indeed, and so does Sam Voaden. A little while ago I chanced to go down the lane after some water, when, curiously enough, Sam was coming along it, and we had a neighbourly word or two between us.

I told Sam all about Charles, and what Mr. Langford charged him with.'

'Kate—you never—!' gasped Honor in dismay.

'I did. Why not? Where's the hurt? Sam swore to me he'd tell no one.'

'What is this?' asked Hillary.

'Don't you know?' retorted Kate. 'What, has Honor not told you? Faith! there never was another girl like her for padlocking her tongue. I'm sure I could not keep from telling. Sam saw I was in trouble and asked the reason, and my breast was as full as my pitcher, so it overflowed. Well, Honor, Sam is not such a fool as some suppose. He has more sense than all we Luxmores put together—leastways, than we had last night. He says he don't believe a word of it, and that you was to blame for acting on it till you knew it was true.'

'It is true. I know it is true,' said Honor disconsolately. 'It is no use denying it.'

'But, as Sam said, why act on it till it is

proved? Where is Charles? All you know is from Taverner Langford, and he is an interested party; he may be mistaken, or he may put things wrong way on wilfully.'

'No, Kate, no! You should not have spoken.'

'But I have spoken. If a pitcher is full, will it not run over the brim? I have been over-full, and have overflowed. That is nature, my nature, and I can't help it. No hurt is done. Sam will not talk about it to anyone; and what he says shows more sense than is to be found in all the nine heads that go under our cottage roof, wise as you consider yourself, Honor. Sam says nothing ought to be promised or done till Charles has been seen and you have heard what account he can give of himself.'

'His letter, Kate?'

'Well, what of his letter? He says nothing about stealing in it—stealing a thousand pounds. What he says may mean no more than his

running away and leaving ninepence a day for nothing.'

'I am sorry you spoke,' said Honor.

'I am glad I spoke,' said Kate sharply. 'I tell you Sam's brain is bigger than all our nine. He saw the rights of the matter at once, and—look here!—he promised me that he would go and find Charles if he's gone no further than Plymouth.'

'You told him where he was!' exclaimed Honor, aghast.

'Of course I did. I wasn't going to send him off searching to Lundy Isle or Patagonia. Well, Sam says that he'll go and find him on certain conditions?'

'On what conditions?'

'Never mind, they don't concern you, they are private. And he wants to have a talk with Larry first; but Sam says he don't believe Charles took the money. He's too much of a Luxmore to act dishonourable, he said.' Honor was still unconvinced. 'Larry,' con-

tinued Kate, 'will you go at once to Swaddledown and see Sam?'

'Yes; but I understand nothing of what this is about. You must explain it to me.'

'No, Larry, go to Sam—he knows all.'

In after years, when the gorse was flowering full, Honor said to Larry, 'The honey scent always brings back to my memory *one* day.'

'Yes,' he replied; 'the furze is like love, thorns and flowers; but the flowers grow, and swell, and burst, and blaze, and swallow up the thorns, that none are seen.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE VISITATION.

THE amazement of Larry was equalled by his indignation when he heard from Sam Voaden the whole story of the charge against Charles, and of Honor consenting to save him at the cost of herself. He did not share Sam's confidence in the groundlessness of the charge; he thought Charles quite rascal enough to have robbed his master and bolted with the money. Nevertheless he thought that the best thing that could be done was for Sam to go after Charles, as he himself could not do so, on account of his arm and collar-bone; and he urged on Voaden to use his best endeavours, if he found Charles, which was doubtful, to

persuade him to return the money, through him, to Langford.

'When he finds that he is suspected he may do that, especially if you threaten to hand him over to the constables should he refuse.'

'I don't believe he ever took it,' said Sam. 'I know Charles better than you.'

Hillary was coming away from Swaddledown, along the road or lane to Broadbury, when he met his uncle Taverner, in his Sunday suit, a hat on his head, walking along lustily, with a stick in his hand.

Larry stood in the way.

'Uncle Taverner,' he said.

'Stand aside,' said Langford roughly.

'One word.'

'Not one! I have nothing to do with you or yours. Stand aside that I may pass on.'

'I cannot; I will not! You are in my path, not I in yours—that is, in the path of my life's happiness.'

Langford looked at him interrogatively.

'Uncle Langford, I must speak to you.'

'I am busy, I have to go to the church. It is the rural dean's visitation. I am church-warden.'

'I will not detain you long.'

'I will not be detained at all.'

'I must speak to you, uncle. You are too —too cruel! you have come between me and happiness.'

'Get along. Don't think anything you say will make me leave Langford to you.'

'It is not that. I have not given that a thought. But, Honor——'

'What of Honor?' asked Taverner sharply, stopping.

'I love her, uncle—I love her with my whole heart. I always have loved her, more or less, but now I love her as I can love no one else.'

'Oh, that is it!' exclaimed the old man, bending his brows, and disguising his agitation and annoyance by striking the stones out of

the road with the end of his stick. 'A boy's fancy, light as thistle-seed; and a boy's head is as full of fancies as a thistle is of seed.'

'Nothing of the sort,' said the young man vehemently. 'There is no one but Honor can make me what I know I ought to become. I have never had a mother or a sister to guide me. I have grown up unchecked, unadvised, and now I want my dear, dear Honor to help me to be what I should be, and am not. Uncle! you sneer at Chimsworthy because it is full of docks, and thistles, and rushes, but I am like that—worthy land, and none but Honor can weed me. Why do you come cruelly in between us, and kill her happiness as well as mine? Her you cannot make other than noble and true, but me!—me, without her you will ruin. I must have Honor! I cannot live without her. Oh, uncle, uncle! what are you doing? It is unworthy of you to use poor Honor's necessity to wring from her her consent. You know she only gives it to save her

brother. Why, because she is generous, would you take advantage of her generosity?'

The lad pleaded with earnestness, vehemence, and with tears in his voice. Taverner looked at him, and thought, 'How like he is to his mother! This is Blandina's face and Blandina's voice. He is not a Nanspian, he is a Langford.' But he said roughly, 'Pshaw! let me go by. The rural dean is waiting. Do not you mistake me for a weathercock to be turned by every breath. You must get over your fancy—it is a fancy—or change it to regard for Honor as your aunt. Do not attempt to move me. What is settled is settled.'

As Hillary still interposed himself between Langford and his course the old man raised his stick.

'Come! must I strike you?' he said angrily. 'I've spoken to you more freely than you deserve. Stand aside. I am not to be turned from my way by you or any other.'

He went forward headlong, striking about him with his stick, and was not to be further stayed. He went, as he said, to the church to meet the rural dean, but not only because summoned—he went also to see him as surrogate, and obtain a marriage licence.

'A Langford cannot be married by banns,' he said. 'And I'm not going to have everyone in church sniggering when our names are called.'

As he went along the road, head down, muttering, the face of Hillary haunted him—pale with sickness, refined, spiritualised by suffering, not the suffering of the body but of the mind. He was strangely like Blandina in her last sickness, and there were tones in his voice of entreaty that brought back to Langford memories of his sister and of his mother.

He arrived at the church before the rector and the rural dean. The latter was taking refreshment at the parsonage a mile away. Would Nanspian be there? He did not wish to meet

him, but he would not be away lest it should be said he had feared to meet him. Nanspian was not there. He had forgotten all about the visitation.

'He wants a deal of reminding,' said the clerk, who had unlocked the church. 'He forgets most things worse than ever since his stroke.'

Langford disengaged himself from the clerk and entered the church—a noble building, of unusual beauty. In the nave at his feet was a long slate stone, and the name TAVERNER LANGFORD. He knew very well that the stone was there, with its inscription and the date 1635; but as he stood looking at it an uncomfortable feeling came over him, as if he were standing at the edge of his own grave. He was alone in the church. The air was chill and damp, and smelt of decay. The dry-rot was in the pews. The slates were speckled, showing that the church roof was the haunt of bats, who flew about in flights when

darkness set in. If it were cold and damp in the church, what must it be in the vault below? He knew what was there—the dust of many Langfords, one or two old lead coffins crushed down by their own weight. And he knew that some day he would lie there, and the 'Taverner Langford' on the stone would apply to him as well as to his ancestor. How horrible to be there at night, with the cold eating into him, and the smell of mildew about him, and the bats fleeting above him! The thought made him uneasy, and he went out of the church into the sunlight, thinking that he would pay a woman to scour the stone of the bat-stains which befouled it. He had never dreamed of doing this before, but when he considered that he must himself lie there, he took a loathing to the bats, and an indignation at the vault-covering stone being disfigured by them.

He walked through the coarse grass to where his sister was laid. She was not buried in the

family vault. Nanspian had not wished it.

The clerk came to him.

'Mr. Nanspian had a double-walled grave made,' said the clerk, who was also sexton. 'Folks laughed, I mind, when he ordered it, and said he was sure to marry again—a fine lusty man like he. But they were wrong. He never did. He has bided true to her memory.'

'I would never have forgiven him had he done other,' said Langford.

'I reckon you never forgive him, though he has not,' said the solemn clerk.

Langford frowned and moved his shoulders uneasily.

'The grave is cared for,' said he in a churlish tone.

'Young Larry Nanspian sees to that,' answered the clerk. 'If there be no other good in him there is that—he don't forget what is due to his mother, though she be dead.'

Langford put his stick to the letters on the headstone. 'In loving memory of Blandina Nanspian, only daughter of Moses Langford, of Langford, gent.' 'Oh!' muttered Taverner, 'my father could call himself a gentleman when he had Chimsworthy as well as Langford, but I suppose I can't call myself anything but yeoman on my poor farm. Blandina should never have married, and then Chimsworthy would not have gone out of the family.'

'But to whom would both have gone after your death, Mr. Langford?' asked the clerk. ''Twould be a pity if an old ancient family like yours came to an end, and, I reckon, some day both will be joined again, by Mr. Larry.'

'No, no!—no, no!' growled Taverner, and walked away. He saw the rural dean and the rector coming through the churchyard gate.

An hour later, Taverner was on his way

home. He had paid the fee, made the necessary application, and would receive the licence on the morrow. It was too late for him to draw back, even had he been inclined. Taverner was a proud man, and he was obstinate. He flattered himself that when he had once resolved on a thing he always went through with it; no dissuasion, no impediments turned him aside. But he was not easy in mind as he walked home. Never before had he seen the family likeness so strong in Larry; he had caught an occasional look of his mother in the boy's face before, but now that he was ill in mind and body the likeness was striking. Taverner still laid no great weight on Larry's expressed attachment for Honor; he did not know that love was not a fiction, and was unable to conceive of it as anything more than a passing fancy. What really troubled the old man was the prospect of disarrangement of his accustomed mode of life. When he was married his wife would

claim entrance into his parlour, and would meddle with what he had there, would use his desk, would come in and out when he was busy, would talk when he wanted quiet. A housekeeper could be kept in order by threat of dismissal, but a wife was tied for life. Then—how about Larry? He might forbid him the house, but would he keep away? Would not he insist on seeing his old friend and companion and love, Honor? That would be dangerous to his own peace of mind, might threaten his happiness. He remembered some words of Mrs. Veale, and his blood rushed through his head like a scalding wave.

When he came to his door Mrs. Veale was there. She seemed to know by instinct his purpose in going to Bratton.

'Have you got it, master?' she asked with husky voice and fluttering eyelids.

'Got what?'

'What you went to get—the licence.'

'It is coming by post to-morrow. Are

you satisfied?' he asked, sneering, and with a glance of dislike.

'A corpse-light came up the lane and danced on the doorstep last night,' said Mrs. Veale. 'And you are thinking of marrying! "I'd better have left things as they were," said the man who scalded his dog to clear it of fleas. The spider spread for a midget and caught a hornet. "Marry come up," said the mote (tree-stump), "I will wed the flame;" so she took him, embraced him, and——' Mrs. Veale stooped to the hearth, took up a handful of light wood-ash, and blew it in her master's face from her palm, then said, 'Ashes, remain.'

The ensuing night the house was disturbed. Taverner Langford was ill, complaining of violent sickness, cramps, and burning in the throat. He must have a doctor sent for from Okehampton.

'Get a doctor's foot on your floor and he leaves his shoes,' said Mrs. Veale. 'No, wait till morning. If you're no better then we will send.'

'Go out of my room,' shouted Taverner to the farm men and maids who had crowded in. His calls and hammerings with the stick had roused everyone in the house. 'Do you think I am going to die because I'm took with spasms? Mrs. Veale is enough. Let her remain.'

'I reckon I caught a chill standing in the damp church with the smell of the vaults in my nose,' said Taverner, sitting in his chair and groaning. 'I felt the cold rise.'

'It is waiting,' remarked Mrs. Veale.

'What is waiting?' he asked irritably.

'The corpse-candle; I see it on the door-step. And you that should be considering to have the bell tolled ordering a wedding peal! Those who slide on ice must expect falls, and elephants mustn't dance on tight-ropes. Rabbits that burrow in bogs won't have dry quarters. The fox said, "Instead of eating I shall be eaten," when, seeking a hen-roost, he walked into a kennel.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

A WARNING.

THE day was wet; a warm south-westerly wind was breathing, not blowing, and its breath was steam, a steam that condensed into minute water-drops. The thatch was dripping. The window panes were blind with shiny films of moisture. There had been dry weather for the haysel, glorious weather, and now, just when wanted, the earth was bathed in a cloud. It would be inaccurate to say that it rained. It rained only under the eaves and beneath the trees; the earth was taking a vapour bath.

Honor and Kate were in the cottage, basket-weaving. The children were at school. No wet dismays the Devonian, but east wind

throws him on his back, and he shrivels with frost. Kate had recovered her spirits marvellously since her interview with Sam Voaden. She had a buoyant heart; it was like a cork in water, that might be pressed under, but came up with a leap again. She felt keenly for the time, but wounds speedily healed with her. It was other with Honor; she remained depressed, pale, thin-looking, and silent. She said nothing to her sister about Hillary. Kate had some glimmering idea that Honor liked the young man, but did not suppose that there was more in her heart than a liking. But Kate, though she dearly loved her sister, was somewhat in awe of her. She never ventured to peer into her soul, and she understood nothing of what went on there. Honor was scrupulous, precise, close; and Kate, though a good-hearted, true girl, was not close, but open, not precise, but careless, and ready to stretch a point of conscience to suit her pleasure. Kate, in the presence of Honor, was much like

an unmathematical boy set over a problem in Euclid. She was sure that all was very true in Honor's mind, but also that the process by which it arrived at its conclusions was beyond her understanding. Honor possessed, what is the prerogative of few women, a just mind. Forced by her position into dividing between the children who looked up to her, obliged to consider their complaints against each other in petty quarrels from opposite sides, and of deciding equably, she had acquired breadth and fairness and self-restraint, against action upon impulse. Kate was eager to take sides, and was partial; Honor never. She was always disposed to consider that there was something to be said on the side opposed to that first presented to her, and was cautious not to pronounce an opinion till she had heard both sides. This Kate could not understand, and she regarded her sister as wanting in warmth and enthusiasm.

'No news yet from Sam,' said Kate. 'That

is odd. I thought we should have known at once about Charles.'

'How could that be? Plymouth is a large place, and Sam Voaden will not know where to look. It is even possible that Charles may have sailed.'

'If he has sailed you need not be tied to old Langford—that is, not unless you like.'

'I have passed my word. I cannot withdraw.'

'Fiddlesticks-ends! You only promised on condition that Mr. Langford would not proceed against Charles.'

'He has not proceeded.'

'He can't—if Charles is out of England.'

'But he might have done so the day he discovered his loss, before Charles got away. I gave my word to prevent his taking immediate action, and so Charles had time to make his escape from the country.'

'Taverner Langford had no right to ask it of you.'

'He did ask it, and I gave my word. I cannot withdraw now. That would not be fair and right.'

Kate shrugged her shoulders. 'I should pay him out in his own coin.'

'Like Charles at the circus?'

Kate coloured. 'That was another matter altogether. Mr. Langford had no right to put such a price on his forbearance. Besides, I don't believe in Charles's guilt. Sam does not, and, thick as some folks think Sam, he has as much brains as are wanted to fill a large skull, and these of first quality. Sam can see into a millstone.'

'Yes, Kate, but what *is* in a millstone?—the same as outside.'

'Sam says that he knows Charles is innocent.'

'What reasons does he give?'

'Oh, none at all. I did not ask for any. *He* thinks it, that is enough for me.'

'He *thinks* it, now; he *knows* it, a minute ago.'

'I am quite sure that Charles never took the money.'

'Why?'

'There you are again with your "whys." Because Sam says it.'

'Yes, dear Kate, Sam is a good-hearted fellow, who will not think badly of anyone, and he supposes others are as straightforward as himself.'

'You have a dozen splendid reasons for thinking Charles a thief, and not one of them convinces me. I don't know why, except that Sam is so positive; but I will scratch all the silver off my looking-glass if I am wrong. Charles did not take the money.'

Honor said no more. It was useless arguing with Kate, and nothing was gained if she did convince her. The girls worked on for a few minutes in silence; then Kate burst out with, 'After all, I do not see anything so dreadful

in becoming Mrs. Langford. One cannot have everything. Taverner has not the youth and looks of—say Sam Voaden, but Sam Voaden has no money of his own, and Mr. Langford can roll in money when his back itches. Langford is a very fine property still, and the house is first-rate. If I take Sam at any time—I don't say I shall—I shall have to put up with poverty. If you take Taverner Langford you must put up with ugliness. You can't catch herring and hake at one fishing.' Then she burst into a ringing laugh.

'It will be worth while marrying him only for the fun of making Larry Nanspian call you aunt.' Honor winced, but Kate was too tickled by the idea to observe her sister's face.

'When is it to be, Honor? It is mean of you to be so secret about the day. I am your sister, and I ought to know.'

'I only do not tell you because you cannot keep a secret, and I wish no one to know till

all is over. Some morning when nothing is expected, it——' She shivered and turned her face to the wall.

'I will not blab. I will not, indeed, dear.'

'Some day this week. Well, if you must know, Thursday. Pray be secret; you will only add to my pain, my shame, if it be known, and a crowd of the curious be assembled to see. *He* also wished it to be kept from getting wind. Indeed, he insisted.'

'I don't like a marriage without smart dresses and bridesmaids. Who is to be best man? I don't believe old Taverner has a friend anywhere. Why—Honor, he'll be my brother-in-law. That is a strange prospect. We'll come up to Langford and see you every day, that you may not be dull. What are you going to do with Mrs. Veale? You are surely not going to keep her! Do you know, Honor, in the kitchen is a darling china spaniel, just like ours yonder on the mantel-

piece, and he turns his head the opposite way to ours. I'm really glad you are going to marry Mr. Langford, because then the dogs will make a pair. They look so desolate, one here and the other there ; they are ordained to keep company.' Honor said nothing ; she let her sister rattle on without paying heed to her tattle.

'Honor,' said Kate, 'do you know whence Charles got the notion of putting the five-pound note under the dog? Guess.'

'I cannot guess. It does not matter.'

'Yes, it does matter. Charles got the notion from sweet Mrs. Veale. When I was at Langford looking for you, I saw that she used the dog as a place for putting things away that must not lie about. If you turn one of these china dogs on end, you will see that they are hollow. Well, Mrs. Veale had stuffed a packet of rat poison into the dog. You remember the man at the Revel who sold bones and packets of poison for mice and rats?

Do you not recollect the board above his table with the picture on it of the vermin tumbling about as if drunk, and some lying on their backs dead? All his packets were in yellow paper with a picture on them in small like that on the board. It does not seem right to let poison lie about. I should lock it up if I had it; but Mrs. Veale is unlike everyone else in her appearance and in her talk, and, I suppose, in her actions. She keeps the yellow paper of rat-poison in the body of the china spaniel. I saw her take it thence, and stow it in there again. The place is not amiss. No one would dream of looking there for it. Who knows? Perhaps Mrs. Veale keeps her money in the same place. Charles may have seen that, and when he came here, and wanted to give us five pounds and escape thanks, he put it under the dog. That is reasonable, is it not, Honor?' Honor did not answer.

'I declare!' exclaimed Kate impatiently. 'You have not been attending to what I said.'

'Yes, I have, Kate.'

'What was I saying? Tell me if you can.'

'You said that Mrs. Veale kept her money in a china dog on the chimneypiece.'

'No, I did not. I said she kept rat-poison there in a yellow paper.'

'Yes, Kate, so you did. She hides the poison there lest careless hands should get hold of it.'

'I am glad you have had the civility to listen. You seemed to me to be in a dream. I don't think, after all, Honor, but for Sam, that I should mind being in your place. It must be an experience as charming as new to have money at command. After all, an old man in love is led by the nose, and you, Honor, he must love, so you can take him about, and make him do exactly what you want. I almost envy you. Where is father?'

'Gone to see Frize, the shoemaker. I had a pair of shoes ordered from him two months

ago, and father has gone to see if they are done. I shall want them on Thursday.'

'Father is quite pleased at the idea of your marriage. I know he is. He makes sure of getting Coombe Park. He says that Mr. Langford will lend the money; and he expects grand days when we get our own again. Father don't believe any more in Charles being guilty, after I told him Sam's reasons.'

'What reasons?'

'Well, I mean assertions. Does father know the day on which you are to be married?'

'No, Kate. Mr. Langford wished him not to be told. Father is so obliging, so good-natured, that if anyone were to press him to tell, he could not keep the secret, so we thought it best not to let him know till just at the last.'

'Won't father be proud when you are at Langford! Why, the van will not contain all his self-importance. To have his eldest daughter married into one of the best and oldest families of the neighbourhood, to be

planted in the best house—after Squire Impey's—in the parish! My dear Honor! an idea strikes me. Shall I throw myself at Squire Impey's head? Father would go stark mad with pride if that were so—that is, if I succeeded. And if he got Coombe back, we three would rule the parish. We might all three become feoffees of Coryndon's Charity, and pass the land round among us. That would be grand! Honor! what is to be done with Mrs. Veale? I cannot abide the woman. It was a queer idea, was it not, putting the rat-poison in the china dog?'

All at once Kate looked up. 'My dear Honor, talk of somebody that shall be nameless, and he is sure to appear.' She spoke in a whisper, as Mrs. Veale came from the steps in at the door. She had a dark cloak thrown over her pale cotton dress. She stood in the doorway blinking nervously.

Honor stood up, put her light work aside, and, with her usual courtesy to all, went

towards her. 'Do you want me, Mrs. Veale? Will you take a chair?'

'No, I will not sit down. So'—she looked about—'you will go from a hovel to a mansion! At least, so you expect. Take care! Take care, lest, in trying to jump into the saddle, you jump over the horse.'

Honor moved a chair towards the woman. Kate looked curiously at her. The pale, faded creature stood looking about her in an inquisitive manner. 'I've come with a message,' she said. 'You are very set on getting into Langford, eh? Oh, Langford is a palace to this cottage.'

Honor did not answer. She drew up her head, and made no further offer of a seat. 'What is your message?' she asked coldly. But Kate fired up in her sister's defence, and, tossing her head, said, 'Don't you suppose, Mrs. Veale, that Honor, or my father, or I, or Joe, or any of us think that a prize has been drawn in your master. Quite the other way—

he is in luck. He don't deserve what he has got, for Honor is a treasure.'

'What message have you brought?' asked Honor again.

The vindictiveness against the girl seemed to have disappeared from the woman—at least, she did not look at Honor with the same malevolent glance as formerly; and, indeed, she was not now so full of hate against her as anger against Langford—the deadlier passion had obscured the weaker.

'What is the message?' she repeated.

'Oh, this: You and your father are to come up to Langford as soon as you can. Lawyer Physick be there and waiting.' Then, with quivering voice and eyelids, and trembling hands thrust through her black cloak, 'I—I be sent wi' this message. He had the face to send me! Him that I've served true, and followed as a hound these fifteen years, turns against me now, and drives me from his door! Look here, Miss Honor Luxmore!'

She held up her long white finger before her face. 'I've knowed a man as had a dog, and that dog wi' ill-treatment went mad, and when the dog were mad she bit her master, and he died.' She blinked and quivered, and as she quivered the water-drops flew off her cloak over the slate floor, almost as if a poodle had shaken himself. 'Take care!' she said again, 'take care! The man that kicks at me won't spare you. Take care, I say again. Be warned against him. I've given you his message, but don't take it. Don't go to Langford. Let Lawyer Physick go away. The licence has come. Let it go to light a fire. Make no use of it. Stay where you are, and let the master find he's been made a fool of. Best so! In the hitting of nails you may hammer your knuckles. I've served him fifteen years as if I were his slave, and now he bids me pack. "I should have thought of my thatch before I fired my chimney," said the man who was burnt out of house and home.'

'Go back to Langford, and say that my father and I will be there shortly.'

'Then take the consequences.' Mrs. Veale's eyes for a moment glittered like steel, then disappeared under her winking white lashes. She turned and left the cottage, muttering, 'When the owl hoots look out for sorrow. When the dog bays he smells death, and I am his dog—and, they say, his blinking owl.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SETTLEMENT.

Oliver Luxmore entered shortly after Mrs. Veale had left. 'Frize promises the shoes by Monday,' he said.

Then Honor told him that he and she were awaited at Langford, and she went upstairs to get herself ready. In the corner of her room was an old oak box, in which she kept her clothes and few treasures. She opened it, and took out the red cloak, her best and brightest pair of red stockings. Then she touched the paper that contained the kerchief Larry had given her. Should she wear it? No; that she could not wear, and yet she felt as if to have it crossed over her bosom would

give it warmth and strength. She opened the paper and looked at the white silk, with its pretty moss-rose buds and sprigs of forget-me-not. A tear fell from her eye on it. She folded it up again, and put it away.

Presently she came downstairs, dressed to go with her father. On Sundays she wore a straw bonnet with cherry-coloured ribbons in it, but now that the air was full of moisture she could not risk her pretty bows in the wet. She would draw the hood of her scarlet cloak over her head.

Neither she nor her father spoke much on the way to Langford. He was, as Kate had said, not ill-pleased at the alliance—indeed, but for the trouble about Charles, he would have been exultant.

Honor had been brought to accept what was best for her and for all the family at last. Oliver had easily accepted Kate's assertion that Charles was innocent, but he would not maintain the innocence of Charles before Honor,

lest it should cause her to draw back from her engagement.

Even on a fine day, with the sun streaming in at the two windows, Langford's parlour was not cheerful. It was panelled with deal, painted slate-grey; the mouldings were coarse and heavy. There were no curtains to the windows, only blinds, no carpet on the floor, and the furniture was stiff, the chairs and sofa covered with black horsehair. What was in the room was in sound condition and substantial, but tasteless. Even the table was bare of cover. Till Honor entered in her scarlet cloak there was not a speck of pure colour in the room. She removed her cloak, and stood in a dark gown, somewhat short, showing below it a strip of red petticoat and her red stockings. Round her neck was a white handkerchief, of cotton, not of silk.

Mr. Physick and Langford were at the table; they were waiting, and had been expecting them. Both rose to receive her and her father, the

first with effusion, the latter with some embarrassment.

'What is the matter with you, sir?' asked the carrier of Taverner Langford. 'You don't look yourself to-day.'

'I've been unwell,' answered the yeoman. 'I had to be down at the church t'other day to meet the rural dean, as I'm churchwarden, and Nanspian is too lazy to act; I heated myself with walking, and I had an encounter with the young Merry Andrew on the way.' He glanced at Honor, but she neither stirred nor raised her eyes from the table. 'Some words passed. He was impudent, and I nigh on thrashed him. I would have chastised him, but that he had a broken arm. My blood was up, and I had to stand in the damp church, and I reckon I got a chill there. I was taken bad in the night, and thought I must die—burning pains and cramps, but it passed off. I'm better now. It was an inflammation, but I'm getting right again. I have to be careful what I eat, that is

all. Slops—slops. I wouldn't dare touch that,' said he, pointing to a brandy bottle beside the lawyer. 'It would feed the fire and kill me.'

'My opinion is that the affection is of the heart, not of the stomach,' laughed Physick, 'and when I look at Miss Honor I'm not surprised at the burning. Enough to set us all in flames, eh, Langford? Heartburn, man, heartburn!—nothing worse than that, and now you're going to take the best medicine to cure that disorder.'

'Not that at all,' said Taverner surlily. 'I caught a chill across me standing waiting in the church at the visitation; I felt the cold and damp come up out of the vault to me. I was taken ill the same night.'

'You've a nice house here,' said the lively Physick, 'a little cold such a day as this, with the drizzle against the windows, but—love will keep it warm. What do you think, Miss Honor, of the nest, eh? Lined with wool, eh? well, money is better than wool.'

Honor measured him with a haughty glance, and Physick, somewhat disconcerted, turned to the carrier and Mr. Langford to discuss business.

Honor remained standing, cold, composed, and resolute, but with a heart weaker than her outward appearance betokened. 'Come,' said Physick, 'next to the parson I'm the most necessary workman to hammer the chain. The parson can do something for the present, I for the future. If you will listen to the settlement, you won't grumble at my part. Little as you may think of me, I've had your interests in eye. I've taken care of you.'

'You have done nothing but what I have bid you,' said Taverner roughly. 'Oliver Luxmore and I talked it over before you, and you have written what we decided.'

'Oh, of course, of course!' exclaimed Physick, 'but there are two ways of doing a thing. A slip of the pen, a turn of expression,

and all is spoiled. I've been careful, and I do consider it hard that the parson who blesses the knot should be allowed to claim a kiss, and the lawyer who plaits it should not be allowed even to ask for one.' He glanced at Taverner and Oliver and winked.

'Certainly, certainly,' said the carrier.

'Come,' said Langford, 'to business. I want her'—he pointed with his elbow at Honor—'to see what I have done. I'm a fair man, and I want her to see that I have dealt generously by her, and to know if she be content.'

'I have asked you for one thing, Mr. Langford, and that you have refused. I must needs be content with whatever you have decided for me, but I care for nothing else.'

'Listen, listen, Honor, before you speak,' said Oliver Luxmore. 'I have considered your interests as your father, and I think you will say that *I* also have dealt handsomely by you.'

'You, dear father!' She wondered what

he could have done, he who had nothing, who was in debt.

'Read,' said Luxmore, and coughed a self-complacent, important cough.

The settlement was simple. It provided that in the event of Honor becoming a widow, in accordance with a settlement made in the marriage of Moses Langford and Blandina Hill, the father and mother of Taverner Langford, the property should be charged to the amount of seventy-five pounds to be levied annually, and that, in the event of issue arising from the contemplated marriage, in accordance with the afore-mentioned settlement the property was to go to the eldest son, charged with the seventy-five pounds for his mother, and that every other child was, on its coming of age, to receive one hundred pounds, to be levied out of the estate. And it was further agreed between Taverner Langford and Oliver Luxmore that, in the event of the latter receiving the estates of the Luxmore family, named Coombe Park, in the parish

of Bratton Clovelly and other, he, the said Oliver Luxmore, should pay to Taverner Langford, the husband of his daughter, the sum of five hundred pounds to be invested in the three per cents. for the benefit of the said Honor Langford, *alias* Luxmore, during her lifetime, and to her sole use, and with power of disposal by will. This was the stipulation Oliver had made; he insisted on this generous offer being accepted and inserted in the marriage contract. Honor listened attentively to every word. She was indifferent what provision was made for herself, but she hoped against conviction that Langford would bind himself to do something for her father. Instead of that her father had bound himself to pay five hundred pounds in the improbable event of his getting Coombe Park. Poor father! poor father!

'You have done nothing of what I asked,' said Honor.

'I have no wish to act ungenerously,' answered Taverner. 'Your request was un-

reasonable; however, I have acted fairly, I have promised to advance your father a hundred pounds to assist him in the prosecuting of his claims.'

'There,' said Oliver Luxmore, 'you see, Honor, that your marriage is about to help the whole family. We shall come by our rights at last. We shall recover Coombe Park.'

Then Taverner went to the door and called down the passage, 'Mrs. Veale! Come here! You are wanted to witness some signatures.'

The housekeeper came, paler, more trembling than usual, with her eyes fluttering, but with sharp malignant gleams flashing out of them from under the white throbbing lashes.

'I be that nervous,' she said, 'and my hand shakes so I can hardly write.'

She stooped, and indeed her hand did tremble. 'I'm cooking the supper,' she said, 'you must excuse the apron.' As she wrote she turned her head and looked at her master. He

was not observing her, and the lawyer was indicating the place where she was to write and was holding down the sheet, but Honor saw the look full of deadly hate, a look that made her heart stand still, and the thought to spring into her brain, 'That woman ought not to remain in the house another hour, she is dangerous.'

When Mrs. Veale had done, she rose, put her hands under her apron, curtsied, and said, 'May I make so bold as to ask if that be the master's will?'

'No, it is not,' said Langford.

'Thank you, sir,' said Mrs. Veale, curtseying again. 'You'll excuse the liberty, but if it had been, I'd have said, remember I've served your honour these fifteen years faithful as a dog, and now in my old age I'm kicked out, though not past work.'

She curtsied again, and went backward out of the room into the passage.

Langford shut, slammed the door in her face.

'Is the woman a little touched here?' asked the lawyer, pointing to his forehead.

'Oh no, not a bit, only disappointed. She has spent fifteen years in laying traps for me, and I have been wise enough to avoid them all.' Then he opened the door suddenly and saw her there, in the dark passage, her face distorted with passion and her fist raised.

'Mrs. Veale,' said the yeoman, 'lay the supper and have done with this nonsense.'

'I beg your pardon,' she said, changing her look and making another curtsey, 'was it the marriage settlement now? I suppose it was. I wish you every happiness, and health to enjoy your new condition. Health and happiness! I'm to leave, and that young chick to take my place. May she enjoy herself. And, Mr. Langford, may you please, as long as you live, to remember me.'

'Go along! Lay the table, and bring in supper.'

'What will you please to take, master?' asked the woman in an altered tone.

'Bring me some broth. I'll take no solids. I'm not right yet. For the rest, the best you have in the house.'

Mrs. Veale laid the table. The lawyer, Langford, the carrier, and Honor were seated round the room, very stiffly, silent, watching the preparations for the meal.

Presently Honor started up. She was unaccustomed to be waited upon, incapable of remaining idle.

'I will go help to prepare the supper,' she said, and went into the passage.

This passage led directly from the front door through the house to the kitchen. It was dark; all the light it got was from the front door, or through the kitchen when one or other door was left open. Originally the front door had opened into a hall or reception room with window and fireplace; but Taverner had battened off the passage, and converted the old

hall into a room where he kept saddles and bridles and other things connected with the stables. By shutting off the window by the partition he had darkened the passage, and consequently the kitchen door had invariably to be left open to light it. In this dark passage stood Honor, looking down it to the kitchen which was full of light, whilst she pinned up the skirt of her best gown, so as not to soil it whilst engaged in serving up the supper. As she stood thus she saw Mrs. Veale at the fire stirring the broth for her master in an iron saucepan. She put her hand to the mantelshelf, took down the china dog, and Honor saw her remove from its inside a packet of yellow paper, empty the contents into the pan, then burn the paper and pour the broth into a bowl. In a moment Kate's story of the rat poison in the body of the dog recurred to Honor, and she stood paralysed, unable to resolve what to do. Then she recalled the look cast at Taverner by Mrs. Veale as she was signing the settlement

as witness. Honor reopened the parlour door, went into the room again she had just left, and seated herself, that she might collect her thoughts and determine what to do. Kate was not a reliable authority, and it was not judicious to act on information given by her sister without having proved it. Honor had seen Mrs. Veale thrust the yellow paper into the flames under the pot. She could not therefore be sure by examination that it was the rat-poison packet. She remained half in a dream whilst the supper was laid, and woke with a start when Taverner said, 'Come to table all, and we will ask a blessing.'

Honor slowly drew towards the table; she looked round. Mrs. Veale was not there; before Taverner stood the steaming bowl of soup.

Langford murmured grace, then said, 'Fall to. Oliver Luxmore, you do the honours. I can't eat, I'm forced to take slops. But I'm better, only I must be careful.' He put his

spoon into the basin, and would have helped himself, had not Honor snatched the bowl away and removed it to the mantelshelf.

'You must not touch it,' she said. 'I am not sure—I am afraid—I would not accuse wrongfully—it is poisoned.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A BOWL OF BROTH.

THE words were hardly out of Honor's mouth before the party were surprised by a noise of voices and feet in the kitchen, and a cry as of dismay or fear. A moment after the tramp was in the passage the parlour door was flung open, and Sam Voaden, Hillary Nanspian and his father, Piper, Charles Luxmore, and Mrs. Veale came in, the latter gripped firmly by Piper and Charles.

'Here I am,' said young Luxmore, with his usual swagger, and with some elation in his tone, 'here I am, come to know what the deuce you mean, Mr. Langford, charging me—a gentleman—not to the face but behind the back,

with stealing your money? Look here, Sam, produce the box. There is your cash—whether right or not I cannot say. I have taken none of it. I did not remove the case. Tell 'em where you found it, Sam.'

'I found it in Wellon's Mound,' said the young man appealed to. 'I've been to Plymouth after Charles. I didn't believe he was a thief, but I'd hard matter to find him. Howsomedever, I did in the end, and here he be. He came along ready enough. He was out of money—wanted to go to America, but had not the means of paying his passage, and not inclined to work it.'

'I've lost a finger,' exclaimed Charles. 'How could I work, maimed as I am?—a wounded soldier without a pension! That is shameful of an ungrateful country.'

'He took on badly,' continued Sam, 'when I told him that Mr. Langford said he had stolen his cashbox with a thousand pounds.'

'I'm a Luxmore of Coombe Park,' said

Charles, drawing himself up. 'I'm not one of your vulgar thieves, not I. Mrs. Veale did her best to tempt me to take it, but I resisted it manfully. At last I ran away, afraid lest she should over-persuade me and get me into trouble, when I saw she had actually got the box. I ran away from Mrs. Veale, and because ninepence a day wasn't sufficient to detain me. I wasn't over-sure neither that I hadn't, against my intention, broke the neck of Larry Nanspian. Now you know my reasons, and they're good in their way. Mrs. Veale, there, is a reg'lar bad un.'

'As soon as Sam returned with Charles,' said Larry, 'they came on direct to Chimsworthy, and then Charles told us the whole tale, how Mrs. Veale had shown him where Mr. Langford kept his money, then how she'd enticed him out on the moor to Wellon's Cairn, and had let him see that she had carried off the box and had concealed it there. Charles told us that it was then that he ran away, and

frightened my horse so that I was thrown and injured.'

'There was nothing ungentlemanly or unsoldierlike in my cutting away,' exclaimed Charles. 'Adam was beguiled by Eve, and I didn't set myself up to be a better man than my great forefather. I'd like to know which of the company would like to be fondled by Mrs. Veale, and made much of, and coaxed to run away with her? She's a bad un. It wasn't like I should reciprocate.'

'When we had heard the story,' continued Larry, 'I persuaded my father and Mr. Piper, who was at our house, to come along with us and see the whole matter cleared up. We went immediately to Wellon's Cairn, and found, as Charles Luxmore said we should, a stone box or coffin, hidden in the hill, with bushes of heather and peat over the hole. That we cleared away, and were able to put our hands in, and extracted from the inside this iron case. It is yours, is it not, Mr. Langford?'

He put the cashbox on the table, taking it into his left hand from his father.

Taverner went to it and examined it. 'Yes,' he said slowly, 'this is the stolen box.'

'The lock is uninjured, it is fast,' said Charles; 'but I can tell you how to open it. "Ebal" is the word this year, and "Onam" was last year's word. Try the letters of the lock and the box will fly open. I know; Mrs. Veale told me. A reg'lar bad un she be, and how she has worreted me the time I've been here! —at ninepence, and Mrs. Veale not even good-looking.'

'How about the five-pound note?' asked Langford, looking hard at Charles from under his contracted heavy brows. 'You can't deny you had that.'

'What five-pound note?—what five-pound note have I had from you?'

'The note you gave us, Charles,' explained his father.

'Oh, that. Did it come from your box?

I did not know it; Mrs. Veale gave it me. Now, don't you glow'r at me that way!' This was to the housekeeper, who had turned her white, quivering face towards him. 'Now don't you try to wriggle or shiver yourself out of my hold, for go you don't; as you couldn't catch me, I've caught you, and to justice I'll bring you; a designing, harassing, sweethearting old female, you be!' He gripped her so hard that she exclaimed with pain. 'And to lay it on me when I was gone! To make out I—that am innocent as the angels in heaven—was a thief! And I, a Luxmore of Coombe Park, and a hero of the Afghan War!—I, that carried off the sandal-wood gates of Somnath! I, a thief! I, indeed! Mrs. Veale gave me, off and on, money when I was short—I wasn't very flush on ninepence a day. A man of my position and bringing up and military tastes can't put up well with ninepence. I only accepted her money as a loan; and when she let me have a five-pound note, I gave her a

promise to pay for it when I came into my property. How was I to know that five pound was not hers? I suppose, by the way you ask, it was not?'

'No,' said Langford, 'it was not; it was taken from my box.'

'That is like her—a bad un down to the soles of her feet. Wanted to mix me up with it and have evidence against me. I reckon I've turned the tables on the old woman—considerably.'

'What do you say to this?' asked Taverner, directing his keen eyes on her face. She was flickering so that it was impossible to catch her eyes. Her face was as though seen through the hot air over a kiln.

'I've been in your service fifteen years,' she said, in a voice as vibrating as the muscles of her countenance. 'I've been treated by you no better than a dog, and I've followed you, and been true to you as a dog. Whenever did I take anything from you before? I've

watched for you against the mice that eat the corn, watched like an owl!'

'You acknowledge this?'

'What is the good of denying it? Let me go, for my fifteen years' faithful duty.'

'No, no,' said Taverner with a hard voice. 'Not yet; I've something more to ask. Honor Luxmore, what did you say when you took my bowl of broth from me?' Honor drew back.

'I spoke too hastily,' she said. 'I spoke without knowing.'

'You said that the bowl contained poison. Why did you say that?'

'It was fancy. Let me throw the broth away. I am sure of nothing.' Unlike her usual decision, Honor was now doubtful what to say and do.

'I insist on knowing. I made a charge against your brother, and it has proved false, because it has been gone into. You have made a charge——'

'I have charged no one.'

'You have said that this bowl'—he took it from the shelf—'is poisoned. Why did you say that? No one touched it, no one mixed it, but Mrs. Veale. Therefore, when you said it was poisoned, you charged her with a dreadful crime; you charged her, that is, with an attempted crime.'

'I heard my sister say that she saw a yellow packet of rat-poison in the china dog on the shelf in the kitchen,' said Honor nervously, 'which—I do not mean the dog—I mean the poison, which Mrs. Veale had bought at the Revel, and when I was in the passage just now I saw Mrs. Veale put the contents of this packet into the broth she was stirring on the fire, before pouring it out into the basin, in which it now is. But,' continued Honor, drawing a long breath, 'but Kate is not very accurate; she sometimes thinks she sees a thing when she has only imagined it, and she talks at random at times, just because she likes to talk.'

'It was mace,' said Mrs. Veale.

'Follow me,' ordered Taverner Langford, taking the basin between his hands, and going to the door. 'Let her go. She will follow me.'

'I've followed at your heel as a dog these fifteen years,' muttered Mrs. Veale, 'and now you know I must follow till you kick me away.'

Charles, however, would not relinquish his hold.

'Don't let her escape,' entreated Charles; 'she's a bad un, and ought to be brought to justice for falsely charging me.'

'Open the door, will you?' said Taverner roughly. 'Mrs. Veale, follow me into the harness-room'—this was the room on the other side of the passage, the room made out of the entrance hall.

Charles drew the woman through the door, and did not relax his hold till he had thrust her into the apartment where Langford wished to speak to her alone.

Taverner and she were now face to face without witnesses. The soft warm mist had changed to rain, that now pattered against the window. The room was wholly unfurnished. There was not a chair in it nor a table. Taverner had originally intended it as an office, but as he received few visitors he had come to use the parlour as reception room and office, and had made this apartment, cut from the hall, into a receptacle for lumber. A range of pegs on the wall supported old saddles and the gear of cart-horses, and branches of bean-stalks, that had been hung there to dry for the preservation of seed. An unpleasant, stale odour hung about the room. The grate had not been used for many years, and was rusty; rain had brought the soot down the chimney, and, as there was no fender, had spluttered it over the floor. The window panes were dirty, and cobwebs hung in the corners of the room from the ceiling—old cobwebs thick with dust. Moths had eaten into the stuffing of the saddles,

and, disturbed by the current of air from the door, fluttered about. In the corner was a heap of sacks, with nothing in them, smelling of earth and tar.

'I've served you faithful as a dog,' said Mrs. Veale. 'Faithful as a dog,' she repeated; 'watched for you, wakeful as an owl.'

'And like a dog snarl and snap at me with poisoned fangs,' retorted Mr. Langford. 'Stand there!' He pointed to a place opposite him, so that the light from the window fell on her, and his own face was in darkness. 'Tell me the truth; what have you done to this broth?'

'If you think there's harm in it, throw it away,' said Mrs. Veale.

'No, I will not. I will send it to Okehampton and have it analysed. Do you know what that means? Examined whether there be anything in it but good juice of meat and water and toast.'

'There's mace,' said the woman; 'I put in mace to spice it, and pepper and salt.'

'Anything else? What do you keep in yellow paper, and in the china dog?'

'Mace—every cook puts mace in soup. If you don't like it throw it away, and I will make you some without.'

'Mrs. Veale, so there's nothing further in the soup?'

'Nothing.'

'You warned me that a corpse-candle was coming to the door—nay, you said you had seen it travel up the road and dance on the step, and that same night I was taken ill.'

'Well, did I bring the corpse-light? It came of itself.'

'Mrs. Veale, I am not generally accounted a generous man, but I pride myself on being a just man. You have told me over and over again that you have served me faithfully for fifteen years. Well, you have had your way. You served me in your own fashion, with your head full of your own plans. You wanted to catch me, but the wary bird don't hop on

the limed twig, to use your own expressions. I don't see that I'm much in your debt; if you are disappointed in the failure of your plans, that's your look-out; you should have seen earlier that nothing was to be made out of me. Now I am ready to stretch a point with you. You have robbed me. Fortunately for me, I've got my money and box back before you have been able to make off with it. What were you waiting for? For my death? For my marriage? Were you going to finish me because I had not been snared by your blandishments? I believe you intended to poison me.'

'It's a lie!' said Mrs. Veale hoarsely, trembling in every limb, and with flickering lips and eyes and nostrils and fluttering hair.

'Very well. I am content to believe so. I can, if I choose, proceed against you at once—have you locked up this very night for your theft. But I am willing to deal even generously with you. It may be I have overlooked

your many services; I may have repaid them scantily. You may be bitterly disappointed because I have not made you mistress of this house, and I will allow that I didn't keep you at arm's length as I should, finding you useful. Very well. The door is open. You shall go away and none shall follow, on one condition.'

He looked fixedly at her, and her quivering became more violent. She did not ask what his condition was. She knew.

'Finish this bowl, and convince me you were not bent on my murder.'

She put out her hands to cover her face, but they trembled so that she could not hold them over her eyes.

'If you refuse, I shall know the whole depth of your wickedness, and you shall only leave this room under arrest. If you accept, the moor is before you; go over it where you will.'

He held the bowl to her. Then her trembling ceased—ceased as by a sudden spasm. She was still, set in face as if frozen; and her eyes,

that glared on her master, were like pieces of ice. She said nothing, but took the bowl and put it to her lips, and, with her eyes on him, she drained it to the dregs.

Then the shivering, like a palsy, came over her again. 'Let me go,' she said huskily. 'Let none follow. Leave me in peace.' Langford opened the door and went back into the parlour. Mrs. Veale stole out after him, and those in the sitting-room heard her going down the passage like a bird, flapping against the walls on each side.

'Where is she going?' asked Charles. 'She is not to escape us. She's such a bad un, trying to involve me.'

'I've forgiven her,' answered Langford in a surly tone. 'I mayn't be over generous, but I'm just.'

'And now, Taverner, one word wi' you,' said old Nanspian. 'I reckon you thought to sloke away this Red Spider, as you did the first; but there you are mistaken. As I've heard,

you have tried to force her to accept you—who are old enough to be her father—shame be to you! But this is your own house, and I'll say no more on what I think. Now, Taverner, I venture to declare you have no more hold on the girl. Her brother never took your money; you were robbed by your own housekeeper. You say you've forgiven her because you are just. What the justice is, in that, I don't see, but I do see one thing clear as daylight, and that is, you've no right any more to insist on Honor coming here as your wife, not unless by her free will and consent, and that, I reckon, you won't have, as Larry, my boy, has secured her heart.'

Langford looked at Nanspian, then at Honor and Larry; at the latter he looked long.

'I suppose it is so,' he said. 'Give me the settlement.' He tore it to pieces. 'I'll have nothing more to do with women, old or young. They're all vexatious.'

'Hark!' They heard a wailing cry.

'Go and see what is the matter,' said Langford to Piper; then, turning to Oliver, he said, 'I tear up the settlement, but I'll not lend the hundred pounds.'

'Larry!' said old Nanspian, 'she shan't be sloked away any more. Take the maid's hand, and may the Lord bless and unite you.' Then to Langford, 'Now look y' here, Taverner. Us have been quarrelling long enough, I reckon. You've tried your worst against us, and you've failed. I've made the first advance on my side, and uninvited come over your doorstep, a thing I swore I never would do. Give me your hand, brother-in-law, and let us forget the past, or rather let us go back to a past before we squabbled over a little Red Spider. You can't help it now; Langford and Chimsworthy will be united, but not whilst we old folk are alive, and Honor will be a queen o' managers. She'll rake the maidens out of their beds at five o'clock in the morning to make the butter, and——'

Piper burst into the room. 'Mrs. Veale!' he exclaimed.

'Well, what of Mrs. Veale?' asked Langford sharply.

'She has run out, crying like an owl and flapping her arms, over the moor, till she came to Wellon's Hill.'

'Let her go,' said Langford.

'She went right into the mound,' continued Piper breathlessly, 'and when I came up she had crawled into the stone coffin inside, and had only her arm out, and she was tearing and scraping at the earth and drawing it down over the hole by which she'd gone in—burying herself alive, and wailing like an owl.'

'Is there any money still hid there?' asked Langford.

'She screamed at me when I came up, "Will you not leave me alone? I be poisoned! I be dying! Let me die in peace!" Whatever shall us do?'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE LOOK-OUT STONE.

One Sunday evening, a year after the events just related, Taverner Langford and Hillary Nanspian, senior, were seated in the sun on the Look-out stone, in friendly conversation. Nanspian was looking happier, more hale, and prosperous than he had appeared since his stroke. He wore the badger-skin waistcoat, and his shirtsleeves. The waistcoat had been relined with brilliant crimson stuff; bright was the hue of the lining displayed by the lappets. Taverner Langford had not a cheerful expression; his hair was more grizzled than it was twelve months ago, and his face more

livid. There was, however, a gentler light in his eyes.

'It is a great change in Larry,' said Nanspian. 'Though I say it, there never was a steadier and better son. He is at work from morning to night, and is getting the farm into first-rate order—you'll allow that?'

'Yes,' answered Langford, 'I'll allow he begins well; I hope it will last. As for first-rate order, that I will not admit. "One year's seeds, three years' weeds," as Mrs. Veale——' He checked himself.

'That were a queer creature,' observed Nanspian, taking the pipe from his mouth, and blowing a long puff. 'That was the queerest thing of all, her burying herself, when she felt she was dying, in old Wellon's grave.'

'It was not his grave. It was a grave of the old ancient Britons.'

'Well, it don't matter exactly whose the grave was. Mrs. Veale seemed mighty set on making it her own.' He continued puffing, look-

ing before him. 'I'm not sure you acted right about her,' he said after a while. 'I suppose you didn't really suppose there was any poison in the broth.'

'I'm a just man,' said Langford. 'To do as you were to be done by is my maxim. And —it's Gospel.'

'But you didn't think it would kill her?'

'I don't know what I thought. I wasn't sure.'

Another pause.

'Swaddledown ain't coming to the hammer after all,' said Nanspian.

'No, I'm glad the Voadens remain on.'

'Ah! and Sam is a good lad. I reckon before Michaelmas he and Kate will make a pair. They'd have done that afore if it had been settled whether Swaddledown would be sold, and they have to leave.'

'Kate is too giddy to be any use in a farm.'

'Oh, wait till she has responsibilities. See

how well she has managed since Honor has been here — how she has kept the children, and made her father comfortable.'

'The children are half their time at Chimsworthy.'

'Well, well, I like to hear their voices.'

'And you see more than you like of Luxmore.'

'Oh, no, I like to see a neighbour. I allow I'm a bit weary of Coombe Park; but bless you, now you and I let him have a trifle, he spends most of his time when not in the van rambling about from one parish to another looking at the registers, and trying to find whether his grandfather were James, or John, or Joseph, or Jonah. It amuses him, and it don't cost much.'

'He'll never establish his claim.'

'I reckon he won't. But it's an occupation, and the carrying don't bring him much money— just enough to keep the children alive on.'

'Have you heard of Charles lately?'

'Oh, he is on the road. That was a fine idea, making a carrier of him between Exeter and Launceston. There are so many stations on the way—there's Tap House, and Crockernwell, and Sticklepath, and Okehampton, and Sourton Down Inn, and Bridestowe, and Lew Down, and Lifton; and he can talk to his heart's content at each about what he did in Afghanistan, and what he might be if his father could prove his claim to Coombe Park. Then he's so occupied with his horses on Sundays at Launceston that he can't possibly get over here to see his relations, which is a mercy.'

'I've been thinking,' said Langford, 'as we've got Larry in for third feoffee in Coryndon's Charity, couldn't we get the baby in for the fourth now there's a vacancy?'

'But the baby ain't come yet, and I don't know whether it'll be a boy or a maid.'

'It would be a satisfaction, and a further bond of union,' argued Langford. 'The

Coryndon trust land comes in very fitting with Langford and Chimsworthy, and I thought that when you and I are gone, Larry might absorb our feoffeeships into himself, as a snail draws in his horns, and then there'd be only he and his son, and when he himself goes, his son would be sole feoffee and responsible to no one. Coryndon's land comes in very fitly.'

'I don't think it can be done,' said Nanspian, shaking his head. 'There's such a lot of ramping and roaring radicalism about. I thought we'd better put in Sam Voaden. Thus it will be in the family.'

'In the Luxmore, not in ours.'

'We can't have everything,' argued Nanspian. Then both were silent again. Langford sighed. Presently he said, 'I'm a just man, and do like to see the property rounded shapely on all sides. That is why I proposed it.'

Then another pause.

Presently Hillary Nanspian drew a long

pull at his pipe, and sent two little shoots of smoke through his nostrils. 'Taverner,' said he, when all the smoke was expended, 'going back to that woman, Mrs. Veale, I don't think you ought to have taken me up so mighty sharp about her. After all this is sifted and said, you must allow you stood afraid of her, and I allow that you had a right to be so. A woman as would steal your cashbox, and make attempts on your heart, and poison your gruel, no man need blush and hang his head to admit that he was a bit afraid of.'

'And, Nanspian,' said Langford with solemnity, 'you will excuse my remarking that I think you took me up far too testily when I said you was a long-tailed ourang-outang, for it so happens that the ourang-outang is a *tailless* ape. Consequently, no offence could have been meant, and should not ha' been taken.'

'You don't mean to say so?'

'It is true. I have it in print in a Nature

History, and, what is more, I've got a picture of an ourang-outang, holding a torn-off bough in his hand, and showing just enough of his back to let folks understand he's very like a man. Well, I've a mind, as the expression I used about you was repeated in the long room of the "Ring of Bells," to have that picture framed and hung up there. Besides, under it stands in print, "The ourang-outang, or *tailless* ape."'

'You will? Well, I always said you were a just man; now I will add you're generous.' The brothers-in-law shook hands. After a moment's consideration Nanspian said, 'I don't like to be outdone in generosity by you, much as I respect you. If it would be any satisfaction to the parish of Bratton Clovelly, the weather being warm, and for the quieting of minds and setting at rest all disputes, I don't object to bathing once in the river Thrustle before the feoffees of Coryndon's Charity, excepting Larry, whom from motives of delicacy I exclude.'

'Well,' said Langford, 'I won't deny you're a liberal-minded man.'

Taverner sprang to his feet, and Nanspian also rose. Over the stile from the lane came Honor, in her red stockings and scarlet cloak, the latter drawn closely round her.

'Why didn't you call us?' said Nanspian. 'We'd have come and helped you over.'

'You shouldn't be climbing about now,' said Taverner.

'Come and sit between us on the Look-out stone,' said Nanspian.

So the two old men reseated themselves on the granite slab, with Honor between them.

'You tried hard to sloke her away,' remarked Nanspian, shaking his head.

'Let bygones be bygones,' said Langford. 'She may be here at Chimsworthy now, but she'll be at Langford some day, I'm proud and happy to think.'

'Ah!' said Nanspian, 'she's made a mighty

change in Larry, and, faith, in me also. I'm a happier man than I was.' He put his arm round behind Honor.

'I may say that of myself,' said Langford. 'I can know that Langford will be made the most of after I'm gone.' He put his arm round her, and clasped that of Nanspian.

'Ah!' said Nanspian, in his old soft, furry, pleasant voice, 'if I'd a many score of faces in front of me, and I were addressing a political meeting, I'd say the same as I says now. Never you argue that what we was taught as children is gammon and superstition, it's no such thing. It has always been said that he who lays hold of a red spider secures good luck, and we've proved it, Taverner and I, we've proved it. Us have got hold of the very best and biggest and reddest of money-spinners between us—us don't try to sloke her away to this side or to that. Her belongs ekally to Chimsworthy and to Langford, to myself

and to Taverner, and blessed if there be a chance for any man all over England of getting such another treasure as this Red Spider which Taverner and I be holding atween us—ekally belonging to each.'

THE END.

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